The Praxis of Revolutionary Action:

Class, Autonomy & Democracy

The Praxis of Revolutionary Action (RA): Class, Autonomy & Democracy

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MARK GAWNE
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Abstract

This thesis seeks to engage with the problem of radical democratic practice, class and autonomy. This thesis aims to utilise and build upon theories and studies of class and radical democracy, through an analysis of the praxis of the collective Revolutionary Action (RA). Through an analysis of RA's engagement with the concepts of class, autonomy and radical democratic organisation, the thesis seeks to contribute an understanding of contemporary forms of radical organisation in relation to class struggle. These aspects of the thesis will provide a foundation for the argument that small, autonomous collectives can be effective and influential within the class struggle. However, the examination of the praxis of RA also seeks to identify and critique weaknesses within the collective. This will involve analysing internal difficulties for the collective, points that hindered the effectiveness of the collective's organising, and contradictions between theory and practice.

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Chapter 1

Sandon Point protest – Interviewees Caitlin Wood, second from left, and Alexander Brown first on right

"So we have come to the core of our problem, the question of revolutionary working class organisation."

Toni Negri, "Crisis of the Planner-State: Communism and Revolutionary Organisation" in Toni Negri, *Revolution Retrieved: Selected Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects 1967-1983*, (Red Notes, London, 1988), p107

Introduction

The formation and experience of Revolutionary Action (RA) fits into the global upsurge in radical politics that occurred during the late 1990s. In another respect, the experience of RA is intimately related to the history, and political climate of Australia and, specifically, Wollongong. As the global project of neo-liberal capitalism intensified during the 1980s and 1990s, it became clear that there was a growing and strengthening

movement in opposition to these developments.[1] Visible across the world in a multitude of forms, many struggles waged under the problematic title of the 'anti-globalisation movement' illustrate an energetic and innovative engagement with democratic organisation, social and class struggle.[2] Many within Australia, and Wollongong, were inevitably involved in this period of struggle – both learning from it, and contributing to it.[3] This thesis seeks to analyse the praxis of RA, based upon its engagement with the concepts of class, autonomy, and democracy, and the collective's practice within key struggles in the Wollongong region during this period. Through this analysis, this thesis aims to contribute to an understanding of radical democratic practice and class organisation.

This thesis aims to utilise and build upon theories and studies of class and radical democracy. Both of these concepts are very broad, and subject to intense and wide ranging debate.[4] As such there are vast amounts of literature dealing with these concepts, from multiple, often contradictory positions. Indeed, both of these concepts have a certain ambiguity associated with them, due to the many contexts in which the terms have been applied. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, these concepts have to be both limited, and to a certain extent, defined. In this context then, this thesis will be engaging class from the perspective of far-left political thought. Similarly, the discussion of democracy and democratic practice is restricted to forms of organisation developed by those on the radical left. The justification for this scope of the thesis lies in the fact that I am looking at forms of radical democracy and organisation confronted by those on the radical left. Indeed, the fundamental question of this thesis is how to understand the relationship between collectives of the radical left, democratic organisation, and their relationship

[1] Verity Burgmann, *Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation*, (Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003), Tim Brambles & John Minns, "Whose Streets? Our Streets! Activist Perspectives on the Australian Anti-Capitalist Movement" in *Social Movements Studies*, vol. 4, No. 2, September 2005, 105-121, Emma Birchman & John Charlton (eds.), *Anti-Capitalism: A Guide to the Movement*, (Bookmarks, London & Sydney, 2001), Louise Amoore (ed.), *The Global Resistance Reader*, (Routledge, London, 2005), Kevin McDonald, *Global Movements: Action and Culture*, (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006)

[2] Naomi Klein, *Fences and Windows: Dispatches From the Frontline of the Globalisation Debate*, (Picador, New York, 2002), pp8-24, & Verity Burgmann, *Op Cit.*, pp276-298

[3] Emma Birchman & John Charlton (eds.), *Op Cit.*, pp257-265

[4] Gregor McLennan, *Marxism, Pluralism and Beyond: Classic Debates and New Departures*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989)

with the generalised class struggle. It is the aim, throughout the analyses of this thesis, to illustrate that relating the concepts of class and autonomy will create a foundation from which to develop an operational conception of radical democratic practice, and also to understand the relationship between far-left organisations and the broader struggle.

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the thesis. This involves a brief overview of neo-liberalism, and the social and class struggles against capital, throughout the late 1990s and the first years of the new millennium. The aim of this overview is to illustrate how and why the concepts of class, autonomy and democracy provide the three conceptual poles navigating this thesis, and to contextualise the formation of RA.

The following chapter will outline and justify the primary research methodologies utilised in the thesis, and also address any issues that arise from these methods. This thesis is dependant upon numerous types of resources, and therefore relies upon various methodological techniques for research. The implications of my involvement in RA on the research process will be addressed, particularly questions concerning bias, legitimate data, and issues of interviewing practices and oral history.

Chapter three will establish the theoretical basis for the analysis of RA. Here, the concepts of class, autonomy and democracy will be examined and clarified. This chapter will establish a theoretical relationship between class, autonomy, and radical democratic practice. Here it will be argued that the development of radical democratic practice involves establishing a direct relationship between autonomy and class as a subject of struggle. Finally, models of democratic centralism, pre-figurative politics, and self organisation will be analysed in order to further illustrate the relationship between class, autonomy, and radical democracy.

Chapter four examines RA's organisational praxis. This chapter will examine the initial formation of RA, and the internal politics of the collective. The collective developed a number of internal, democratic mechanisms, in an attempt to construct an alternative praxis to those developed within other organisations of the left. The purpose

of this chapter is to illustrate the ways in which concepts of class, autonomy and democracy were theorised and practiced by RA in an organisational sense, and to establish a foundation from which to examine RA's engagement with class struggle.

Chapter five examines RA's praxis in terms of the collective's involvement in struggle. This chapter will analyse RA's involvement in the Port Kembla Copper Smelter Picket of 2000, the Joy Mining dispute throughout 2000, and at Sandon Point over the course of 2001-2003. These analyses will illustrate how RA's engagement with class, autonomy and democracy influenced its perspective on political action. This analysis will also raise questions concerning the context of class struggle and the labour movement in the Wollongong region at the time.

The concluding section will clarify the findings of the overall thesis. The assertions of chapter three will be traced throughout the experience of RA. These assertions are that class needs to be understood as a diverse, heterogeneous subject of struggle; that the concept of autonomy is of central importance for this understanding, and that both class and autonomy inform radical democratic practice. This analysis will examine the effectiveness of RA in engaging and implementing radical democratic practice, and follow the translation of these practices into political action. Finally, the extent to which the experience of RA provides insights for radical democratic organisation within the broader class struggle will be assessed.

Effects of Neo-Liberalism

The neo-liberal project has seen an alliance between state leaders and capital, seeking to juridically ensure the formation of an increasingly global, economic regime.[5] Throughout this period, many advanced capitalist states under the influence of New Right

[5] This is not to say that there is not significant division throughout the ruling classes of contemporary global capitalism. Indeed, evidence of divisions between different sectors of the ruling political & capitalist classes is significant. Nonetheless, there are numerous practices of neo-liberal governance that are reproduced and traceable throughout broad sections of the ruling classes, indicating certain aspects of ideological homogeneity, tending toward such an alliance. See Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 2001), David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005)

political orthodoxy, with the functionaries of capital, sought to impose a new, global economic practice. Beginning under the leaderships of Reagan in Washington, and Thatcher in the UK, the capitalist project throughout the 1980s and 1990s has been characterised by a fierce aggression across the world.[6] This aggression has taken such forms as cuts to social spending by governments, the deregulation of markets, and the imposition of free-market practices.[7] This has involved the dismantling of Keynesian methods of economic management, and the undermining, and destruction, of the forms of working class power associated with the mass worker.[8] Through a process of global restructuring, the era of neo-liberal free-trade has seen the growth of finance capital and increasing mobility in the movements of capital across borders. Furthermore, there has been intensified commodification, and the development of a global division of labour.[9] Many studies indicate that these processes have all contributed to the deterioration of labour standards throughout the world, an upward concentration of wealth distribution and ownership, and increasing levels of environmental destruction.[10]

The operations of global capital throughout this period have generally been justified in the name of free-trade.[11] Whilst it is often argued that globalisation has undermined the traditional operations of the state, the project of neo-liberalism is effectively a restructuring of the state, allowing for greater intervention and repression of counter-capitalist forces.[12] Complimenting this, the formation of supranational and

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[6] David Harvey, *Ibid.*, 64-70
[7] *Ibid.*, 84-90
[8] Antonio Negri, *Revolution Retrieved: Selected Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects, 1967-1983*, (Red Notes, London, 1988), pp203-210
[9] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism*, (University of Illinois Press, Chicago & Urbana, 1999), pp139-147 Naomi Klein, *Op Cit.*, Bruno Amoroso, *On Globalisation: Capitalism in the 21st Century*, (Palgrave, New York 1998), pp33-50 & Amory Starr, *Naming the Enemy: Anti-Corporate Movements Confront Globalisation*, (Zed Books, New York, 2000), pp27-45
[10] *Ibid.*, Jeff Borland, Bob Gregory & Peter Sheehan (eds.), *Work Rich, Work Poor: Inequality and Economic Change in Australia*, (Centre for Strategic Economic Studies Victoria University, Melbourne, 2001) & Anthony Payne, *The Global Politics of Unequal Development*, (Palgrave McMillan, New York, 2005), pp137-166
[11] Ann Capling, Mark Considine & Michael Crozier, *Australian Politics in the Global Era*, (Longman, Melbourne, 1998), pp47-65
[12] David Harvey, *Op Cit.* & Jodi Dean "The Networked Empire: Communicative Capitalism and the Hope For Politics" in Paul A. Passavant & Jodi Dean, *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*, (Routledge, New York, 2004), pp265-285

multilateral financial bodies, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), indicates the extent to which global finance is a determinant force in contemporary global governance.[13] The premise of neo-liberal orthodoxy, that the market is the most efficient mechanism of social organisation, economic production and distribution, carries the political consequences of the forcible dismantling of all barriers to free-trade, legally sanctioned and implemented by the institutions indicated above.[14] Thus, in the name of free-trade, the 1980s and 1990s have witnessed substantial attacks on the conditions of labour throughout the world, an undermining of environmental protections, and an upward flow of wealth.[15] For example, this period has seen two recessions, and a drop in overall growth to 2% in leading economies. The upward flow of wealth is indicated by the growing disparity between the wealthiest and poorest people in the world.[16] Increasingly, it is evident that there is an inseparability between market and state forces in the interests of global capital.

The initial neo-liberal offensive in Australia is marked by the Hawke and Keating governments of the 1980s and early 1990s, undertaken in the name of economic rationalism.[17] This began in 1983 when Australia's financial sector was deregulated, and the Australian dollar was floated.[18] According to Catley, this point marked a core shift in Australian politics, prioritising the question of how to create competitive markets that could compete at international standards.[19] In so far as the working class was concerned, the Accord process constituted the first mechanism aimed at controlling the labour movement in the interests of Australia's position in the new global economy.[20] The restructuring of labour that began with the Labor Government, has resulted in "declining

[13] *Ibid*,, pp45-48, & Amory Starr, *Op Cit.*, pp23-45
[14] Verity Burgman, *Op Cit.*, pp327-349
[15] *Ibid.*, Jeff Borland, Bob Gregory & Peter Sheehan (eds.), *Work Rich, Work Poor: Inequality and Economic Change in Australia*, (Centre for Strategic Economic Studies Victoria University, Melbourne, 2001) & Anthony Payne, *Op Cit.*
[16] This disparity is found between both richer and poorer nations and regions of the world, as well as between class divides within a given nation, indicating not just a divide between the North and the South, but between social classes as well. See Anthony Payne, *Op Cit.*,
[17] Bob Catley, *Globalising Australian Capitalism*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996) & John Quiggin, "Economic Policy" in Robert Manne, *The Howard Years*, (Black Inc. Agenda, Melbourne, 2004), pp174-175
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] *Ibid.*

manufacturing employment, persistently high levels of unemployment, increasing proportions of workers in casual and part-time work."[21] These developments constitute the initial stages of neo-liberal project in Australia.

Under the Liberal Government of John Howard economic rationalism has intensified.[22] Some of the key characteristics of neo-liberalism, outlined above, have come to define the climate in Australia. Privatisation and deregulation increased, whilst attacks on the collective power of labour in the workplace were carried out through federal legislation.[23] Borland has shown that the 1990s in Australia reflected the growing disparity of wealth ownership evident on a global scale, despite growth in Australia's employment figures.[24] Two key components of economic rationalism under the Howard Government involved contracting government services and privatising government assets, and the deregulation of the labour market.[25] Peter Reith's industrial legislation of 1996, replacing the Accord agreement, is indicative of capital's attacks on workers, undertaken through the Australian state. These attacks have continued throughout the Howard period, evident in the implementation of the *Work Choices Act* in the past year.

Confronting Neo-liberalism

In response to the characteristics of neo-liberal capitalism outlined above, there has emerged a significant movement of counter tendencies.[26] The offensive waged by global capital through the neo-liberal project has been severe and far-reaching. It is not surprising, then, that the manifestations of resistance to neo-liberalism have been diverse,

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[21] Sally Weller & Michael Webber, "Precarious Employment & Occupational Change" in Jeff Borland et al., *Op Cit.*, p160
[22] Anthony Moran, *Australia: Nation, Belonging, and Globalisation*, (Routledge, New York & London, 2005), pp30-31
[23] Jeff Borland et al., *Op Cit.* & Robert Manne, "The Howard Years: A Political Interpretation", in Robert Manne, *Op Cit.*, p8-11
[24] Jeff Borland, Inequality and Economic Change" in Jeff Borland, *Op Cit.*, pp1-20
[25] Robert Manne, *Op Cit.*
[26] Louise Amoore (ed.), *The Global Resistance Reader*, (Routledge, London, 2005), pp1-9 Catherine Erschle & Bice Maiguaschca, *Critical Theories, International Relations and the 'Anti-Globalisation Movement': The Politics of Global Resistance*, (Routledge, New York, 2005), & Kevin MacDonald, *Op Cit.*

strong, and at times contradictory. Indeed, struggles and campaigns have been waged from an array of positions, and embodied diverse politics. However, there are common demands and grievances that can be traced throughout the generality of this period of struggle.[27] Hardt and Negri group these common characteristics into four broad categories of grievances. They identify grievances of representation, referring to the lack of democratic representation throughout all tiers of global governance, and grievances of rights and justice, capturing demands framed in terms of both civil and human rights. Further, there are economic base grievances, often framed against poverty and debt, and sometimes anti-capitalist in nature, and finally biopolitical grievances, which refer to struggles that reflect the global nature of exploitation, such as ecological exploitation.[28] However, such demands also go further than seeking reform from those who hold administrative power throughout the global system.

A significant aspect of the recent cycle of struggle has been the engagement with forms of organisation, democratic practice, social and class struggle, aimed directly at those deemed responsible for the operations of global capital.[29] Such an engagement with democracy and struggle has been evident across the globe, throughout the 1990s and into the first years of the new century. Some have framed these struggles as 'anti-globalisation', others as 'anti-corporate', whilst a specifically anti-capitalist politics has also been identified within these movements.[30] In this context, the concept of class as a subject of struggle has had renewed attention, after the influence of post-modern identity politics.[31] Significant, however, is the engagement with the concept of class that has moved beyond the homogenous figure of the classical proletariat. Rather, certain theories of class engage the concept on a terrain that embodies diversity, difference and autonomy, proposing class as an ontological subject.[32] To an extent, this is reflected in

[27] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 2005)
[28] *Ibid.*, pp270-285
[29] Sarah Maddison & Sean Scalmer *Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements*, (UNSW Press, NSW, 2006), & Verity Burgmann, *Op Cit.*, pp276-299
[30] Amory Starr, *Op Cit.*
[31] Verity Burgman, *Op Cit.*
[32] Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Species-Being & the New Commonism: Notes on an Interrupted Cycle of struggles", in *The Commoner*, n11, Spring, 2006, & Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, pp102-115 This assertion does not mean that the recent cycle of struggle can be framed simply as a new form of class

the forms of organisation that have been developed by the participants in these struggles. Problems of democratic organisation have been confronted from numerous perspectives. Decentralised, participatory and non-hierarchical forms of democracy have characterised the organisation of these movements.[33] Although the precise nature of the recent period of struggle is contested, and its composition often contradictory, it is nonetheless clear that questions of class, autonomy and democracy were key problems for many involved.[34]

There were a number of actions and struggles in response to capital's campaigns in Australia. The Maritime Union of Australia's dispute illustrates one such example of class conflict during this time.[35] In the Illawarra region the Joy Mining dispute provides evidence of further conflict based around issues of class and employment. The environmental movement in Australia during this time was influential. Here there were numerous struggles against mining and nuclear energy. Again, in the Illawarra region, the Sandon Point struggle embodied many of the politics of the period, including Indigenous rights, green politics, and questions of democracy.[36] Throughout these struggles there were a growing number of people confronting the traditional politics and organisational structures of the left within Australia. As a result, numerous problems were posed and confronted that bore directly upon questions and forms of organisation, and how to effectively promote the highest amount of participation and democracy in the movement. RA collectively participated in, and contributed to, these politics. Such participation took the forms of militant activity in a number of struggles, assisting in the organisation of a number of events, forming broad collectives on common issues, and theoretical dialogue with other organisations and individuals.

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struggle. Elements within the recent movements resist this categorisation. However, in the context of global capital, a theoretical foundation for this conception of class becomes clear.

[33] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Roland Bleiker "Seattle and the Struggle for a Global Democratic Ethos" in Catherine Erschle & Bice Maiguaschca, *Critical Theories, International Relations and the 'Anti-Globalisation Movement': The Politics of Global Resistance*, (Routledge, New York, 2005), & Joel Schallit (ed.), *The Anti-Capitalism reader: Imaging a Geography of Opposition*, (Akashic Books, New York, 2002)

[34] Louise Amoore, *Op Cit.*

[35] Anne Davies & Helen Trinca, *Waterfront: The Battle That Changed Australia*, (Doubleday, Sydney, 2000)

Chapter 2

RA comrades – May Day 2000

"The dissemination of self-organised knowledge can create a social framework containing infinite autonomous and self-reliant worlds."

Franco Berardi – "What is the Meaning of Autonomy Today? Subjectivation, Social Composition, Refusal of Work"

Methodology: Collective Knowledge

This chapter will establish and justify the research methodologies used in the thesis. The primary research methods have been a consideration of key theoretical texts, interviews with members and participants of the collective, and analysis of the primary documents produced by RA, and documents reporting on the key struggles in which RA was involved.

Theory & Literature

A vast amount of literature exists that deals with the concepts of class, democracy, and autonomy. Sarah Maddison's and Sean Scalmer's recent work has contributed to an understanding of the approaches that people take to the problem of organisation and democracy.[37] Out of these analyses, a central problem identified was relates to the issue of establishing a basis for unity, whilst recognising and maintaining diversity and difference within the organisation and throughout the movement. This issue of unity and difference has been central throughout elements of the recent cycle of struggle; it raises questions on how to organise in a way that establishes commonality whilst maintaining autonomy.[38] This thesis aims to contribute to an understanding of democratic practice and autonomy, through an analysis of the praxis of RA.

As a part of the recent struggles in the late 1990s, a body of literature has grown addressing the democratic practice of sectors of these movements.[39] Although this thesis is not concerned with the 'anti-globalisation' movement in any direct sense, the experience of RA nonetheless fits into this period of struggle, and so it is worth addressing some of the limitations of this body of literature in relation to this thesis. For the most part, the literature concerning this period of struggle is largely focused on the experiences of Europe and America.[40] However, this period of struggle has also seen a significant engagement with new forms of democratic practice in Australia and elsewhere.[41] One major limit to this literature is its focus on summit hopping

[37] Sarah Maddison & Sean Scalmer *Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements*, (UNSW Press, NSW, 2006)
[38] *Ibid.*, Louise Amoore (ed.), *The Global Resistance Reader*, (Routledge, London, 2005), & Kevin McDonald, *Global Movements: Action and Culture*, (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006)
[39] Ibid., Joel Schallit (ed.), The Anti-Capitalism reader: Imaging a Geography of Opposition, (Akashic Books, New York, 2002), Verity Burgmann, Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation, (Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003), Tim Brambles & John Minns, "Whose Streets? Our Streets! Activist Perspectives on the Australian Anti-Capitalist Movement" in Social Movements Studies, vol. 4, No. 2, September 2005, 105-121, Emma Birchman & John Charlton (eds.), *Anti-Capitalism: A Guide to the Movement*, (Bookmarks, London & Sydney, 2001), Berch Berberoglu, *Globalisation and Change: The Transformation of Global Capitalism*, (Lexington Books, New York, 2005) & Notes From Nowhere (eds.), *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism*, (Verso, London, 2003)
[40] Of those works cited above, only Burgmann's and Brambles and Minns' deal closely with Australia, whilst *We Are Everywhere* has a section on the Woomera breakout.
[41] Verity Burgmann, *Op Cit.*, Sarah Maddison & Sean Scalmer, *Op Cit.*

demonstrations. In this context, the discussion of praxis is restricted to the organisational processes involved with the major protest events. As a result, democratic practice, and the 'movement', is framed only in terms of what is most visible, whilst sets of immanent practices of resistance are reduced to the moments of protest most easily identified. Indeed, the "real movement" abolishing the "present state of things"[42] is largely silenced through such a focus on summits.

The study of radical praxis within Australia is a largely neglected area of research. Whilst there are a number of studies dealing with the history of the union movement, the Communist Party, and social movements in Australia, the Australian far-left is much harder to find in academic texts.[43] Even within the literature that has analysed the recent movements against neo-liberalism, a substantial analysis of the praxis developed by groups on the far-left is hard to find, generally replaced by a general account of affinity groups and the internet.[44] In other cases, the experience of far-left groups is often defined as merely adventurist, isolated, and utopian. However, numerous historical examples illustrate the pivotal contributions made by far-left groups to the process of class and social struggle; as well as the development of sophisticated praxes, and despite sometimes have small memberships managing to affect and work positively with other groups.[45] Indeed, the key question is not whether the political perspective of a group is far-left, but the democratic nature of the organisation, and the relationship it seeks to establish with the broader struggle.

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[42] Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology" in David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings.*, p171

[43] Verity Burgman, *Op Cit.*

[44] Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*, (Pluto Press, London, 2004), pp45-51

[45] Ricardo Blaug, "Blind Hierarchism & Radical Organisation", *New Political Science*, vol22, no3, 2000, pp379-395, Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, (University of California Press, Berkeley & London, 1999), Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, (Pluto Press, London, 2002), & Steve Wright, "A Party of Autonomy" in Timothy S. Murphy & Abdul-Karim Mustapha, *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Resistance in Practice*, (Pluto Press, London, 2005)

Through an engagement with the theories and questions raised above, this thesis seeks to contribute to an understanding of radical democratic practice. Although RA was an organisation of the Australian far-left, the collective's praxis of class politics based in plurality, autonomy, and commonality, allowed the collective to move beyond adventurism and utopianism.

Participants & Interviews

The accounts given by RA participants constitute a central foundation of the analyses undertaken within this thesis. Eight individuals who had been active within RA were interviewed, to allow the 'collective knowledge' of RA to inform the thesis. The interviews took place between the 8th and the 18th of September in 2006, in each individual interviewee's house. The interviewees reflect varying aspects of the composition of the collective. All the interviewees were involved with RA for at least a year, and each had different level of involvement in the varying actions and campaigns in which RA was involved. The three founding members of the collective were interviewed, as was the first member who joined in the initial stages of the collective's formation. Three interviewees joined within the first year of the collectives operations, whilst two joined about halfway through the collective's development. The most significant disparity is found between the representation of men and women in the interview process, with only three women compared to six men. This figure reflects the general composition of the collective.[46]

Semi-structured interviews were utilised as the model of interviewing. Contrary to the positivist pursuit of a pure objectivity, recognising that the "objects of history are also subjects", allows for the subjects to be active participants in the research process and narrative.[47] The concept of praxis can refer to an ontological process, in which subjects,

[46] Inerview, #7, Interview, #6
[47] Martyn Hammersley & Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, (Tavistock Publications, London & New York, 1983) p63

and their relationships with those around them, are central to the ongoing processes of constructing 'collective knowledge' and understanding. Communication is a central part of this process. For RA, a collective in certain respects concerned with a project of immanent communism – of attempting to organise and function in a way that already embodies the vision of the future – an exposition and analysis of the internal narrative of the members is crucial for developing a thorough understanding of such a constructive process, of such a 'collective knowledge'.

The semi-structured model of interview operates in a way that allows the researcher to cover a number of key topics or areas, whilst allowing for a large amount of autonomy and control over discussion for and by the interviewee. Similarly, the interviewer has more opportunity to develop the answers given by the respondent, through the conversational nature of semi-structured interviews.[48] The scope for conversation and cooperative construction of knowledge, provided by the semi-structured interview, establishes a common foundation from which to engage each interview, whilst also leaving open the potential for the conversation to develop.[49] I utilised a list of questions, included in the appendix, in the interviews, but allowed each interviewee to dictate the direction and pace of the interview. This method is highly beneficial for the fact that a significant amount of the thesis is dedicated to analysing the ways in which the collective developed over time, how this was reflected in both thought and action by members of RA, and how RA functioned as a collective throughout these developments.

I was a participant in RA for over two years. This fact raises questions concerning the problem of 'insider' knowledge. There is a significant debate concerning the role of the researcher as an 'insider' or 'outsider' in relation to the area of study, and

[48] Tim May, *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, (Open University Press, Philadelphia, 1994), pp96-99
[49] Allan Kellehear, *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods*, (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1993) & Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods 2nd Edition*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004), p21

the question of valid and reliable knowledge and data.[50] The research I am undertaking is in many ways more intimate than the general conception of the participant observation method.[51] This point also raises questions about the role and position of the researcher in relation to the interviewees.[52] One central criticism of oral history is the possibility of failed memory, bias, and exaggeration.[53] Similarly, in terms of 'insider knowledge', authors have noted that results can reflect the interests and biases of the researcher; that the 'inside' researcher will not escape the influence of their own involvement, and the possibility of the researcher making a priori assumptions about results.[54] All of these concerns are relevant to the research involved with this thesis.

There is no doubt that my own personal experience and history has been integral to my development as a researcher, and my relationship with the former members of RA will be reflected in various ways throughout the interview process. As such I will have to be wary of my own biases, as well as the biases of the former RA members. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the interviews were not constructed in a manner that sought to uncover a specific or predetermined truth I thought existed. Rather, the method was employed in order to allow participants the opportunity to recall and explain their own experiences, which, when taken collectively, could help to interpret the general experience of the collective, specifically in relation to the aims of this thesis.

Despite questions of 'insider' and 'outsider' knowledge, my personal experience with RA can be used to enhance the research; my participation can contribute to understanding the context of the study.[55] Indeed, the distinction between 'insider' and

[50] Dennis E. Poplin, *Communities: A Survey of Theories and Methods of Research*, (Macmillan, New York, 1979), p299
[51] Tim May, *Op Cit.*, pp111-118
[52] Charles T. Morrisey, "On Oral History Interviewing" in Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, (Routledge, New York, 1998), pp107-113
[53] Dennis E. Poplin, *Op Cit.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Martyn Hammerseley & Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, (Tavistock Publications, New York, 1983), pp17-18

'outsider' is often ambiguous, as relationships change. Nonetheless, as Poplin has stated, benefits of being an 'insider' include having access to the 'inside story'.[56] Many participant observers integrate themselves into areas and social relations that do not reflect the relations they generally have in their own everyday lives.[57] In this context, my involvement in RA can have a positive effect on the interviewing process. As Hammersley and Atkinson note, rather than seeking to eliminate the effect of the researcher, we should seek to understand it.[58] My participation in RA was an inherent part of my general social relations for the time that I participated in the collective. As such my participation did not 'contaminate' the balance of social relations within RA. Because I was not participating for the sake of research, but rather as an aspect of my everyday life, I was able to become a 'complete participant.'[59]

There is an obvious need to pay attention to the balance between objectivity and subjectivity during the interview process. In the first place, the need to find an inter-subjective understanding that would allow for an open interview is readily met through the relationships I have already established with many of the interviewees, and through my statute as an 'insider' of the subject.[60] My role as researcher will often also be one of friend, which will assist in developing a conversational interview and free flow of information. All of these interviews are important, as they are all concerned with explaining the world in which they are involved. The differing accounts given by members of RA will be central to developing a social theory that can contribute to understanding the role of the collective RA. In this sense the collected interviews can be used with and against each other to develop and understanding of RA's praxis, and as evidence of the perspectives of the respondents involved.

[56] Dennis E. Poplin, *Op Cit.*
[57] Tim May, *Op Cit.* pp112-115
[58] *Ibid.* p17
[59] *Ibid.* p117
[60] *Ibid.*, p96

Documents

The final method utilised in the thesis will be an examination of documentary resources. There are a number of document types that will be used in the thesis: RA's journal 'enRAged,' the digital archives of RA, unpublished articles, and mainstream media. When analysing these documents it will be necessary to conceptualise them in varying ways in order to utilise them in the development of the thesis.[61] Whilst it will be useful and necessary to analyse the specific content of each of the articles and documents in their own terms, it is also important to analyse each document as a product created in specific settings and within certain social relations. The documents produced by RA will have to be located within the general developments of the collective, as products not only of the individual authors but of the debates and discussions that were had between the members. Similarly the purpose of the document will have to be considered when analysing the document and its meaning. Documents produced for circulation within the collective will have a different meaning to those produced for circulation in the public. In this sense the intended audience will affect the writing of the document.

Many studies have indicated that the mainstream media distorts the practices and realities of left political organizations, and actions.[62] This reflects a negative bias in the media towards radical politics. Many of the events in which RA was involved received significant media attention, and this thesis will be relying on some of these texts as sources for research. On the other hand, the documents produced by RA embody RA's bias, which can be reflected in the collective's interpretation of events. Both of these forms of bias need to be considered when utilising the documents, whilst interpreting the texts in relation to each other can assist in negating their respective leanings.

[61] Lindsay Prior, *Using Documents in Social Research*, (Sage Publications, London, 2003), pp2-4, Alan Bryman, *Op Cit.*, pp380-398
[62] Damien Cahill, "The Anti-WEF Protests & The Media" in *Social Alternatives*, vol.20, no1, January 2001, pp63-67

Chapter 3

Wollongong May Day 2002 – interviewees Nick Southall (foreground) 1st on left, Caitlin Wood and Rachael Cathcart 2nd & 4th from left, and Dave Eden 2nd from right

"Political autonomy is the desire to allow differences to deepen at the base without trying to synthesise them from above, to stress similar attitudes without imposing a 'general line', to allow parts to co-exist side by side in their singularity."

-Sylvere Lotringer & Christian Marazzi, "The Return of Politics" in *Italy: Autonomia, Post-Political Politics*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1980

Theorising Class, Autonomy and Democracy

The purpose of this chapter is to establish a theoretical foundation for radical democratic practice, founded upon an understanding of a political conception of class, and of political and class autonomy. This chapter will consider some of the key theories that contribute to an understanding of the concept of class, the meaning of political autonomy, and how these two ideas inform democratic practice. The central argument of this chapter is that the recognition and practice of political autonomy is a central element of radical democratic practice and class politics. Moreover, this chapter will argue that rooting radical democratic practice in a political understanding of both class and

autonomy, provides an operational basis for dealing with problems of unity and difference within the organisations of social and class struggle. This discussion is central to understanding the praxis of RA. Through the clarification of these terms it will become possible to analyse RA's implementation of these concepts, both organisationally and practically, in the following two chapters.

Karl Marx & Class

The primary theorist of class and class relations is Karl Marx, and much of the subsequent work on class draws on elements of his work. Marx's work is voluminous, complex, and often contradictory. A number of political, economic and philosophic readings have been made of Marx's work, which have developed into an array of often contradictory traditions, falling under the problematic rubric of Marxism.[63] Generally speaking, he saw capital as an ensemble of social relations, which was dependent upon the antagonism between classes.[64] The primary subjects of Marx's work were the proletariat or working class, and capital. Although, for the most part, Marx's work focussed on the operations and power of capital, there is none the less many clear articulations of what constitutes the working class, and its power, contained within his work.[65] The working class are those compelled to commodify their labour-power, sell it on the market, work in order to live, and make up the vast majority of capitalist society.[66] The capitalist class is made up of those who own the means of production, buy the labour

[63] Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1979), Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1999), Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, (Pluto Press, London, 2002), Gregor McLennan, *Marxism, Pluralism and Beyond: Classic Debates and New Departures*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989)

[64] Karl Marx, "Poverty of philosophy", in David McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977), pg198-199, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, (Random House, New York), pp344, 553-554, & 700 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, (Pelican Books, Middlesex, 1973), pp267-268, & 770-771 Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, (Unwin Books, London, 1960), pp15-26, & Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977)

[65] Karl Marx, *Capital*, pp717-719 & 1031-1034, Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifesto*, pp20-27 & Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme" in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Selected Works vol. 3*, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977), pp13-30

[66] Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifesto*, pp20-27 & Karl Marx, *Capital*, pp799-800, Mike Donaldson, "The Working Class", *Class: History, Formations and Conceptualisations*, Hegemony Research Group Workshop, University of Wollongong, March 3, 2006

time of the working class, and own the wealth or profit created during the production process.[67] For Marx, the class struggle between the proletariat and the collective capitalist class constituted the primary mechanism for the growth and intensification of capitalist social relations.

For Marx, capitalism is an inherently expansive system, driven by internal contradictions, tending to impose itself across the globe. Marx wrote of the processes by which capital expands, imposes its social relations, and transforms existing societies and production processes into capitalist ones.[68] The "Appendix" to *Capital Vol. 1* provides clear articulations of such processes.[69] Here Marx talks of both formal and real subsumption. Formal subsumption is characterised by the initial transformation of social relations and production processes into capitalist relations. Through formal subsumption capital is generated from the existing productive process, without a thorough transformation of broader social relations.[70] That is, there is no immediate and significant change in the production process through technological innovations. Yet, during the formal subsumption of labour to capital, the production process becomes increasingly cohesive and continuous.[71] Production levels increase, effectively intensifying and expanding capitalist domination of social organisation, whilst tending towards a complete restructuring of social life around production.[72]

Real subsumption develops out of the conditions created through the formal subsumption of labour to capital.[73] This era is constituted by the complete imposition of capitalist productive processes on society; the transformation of relations of production in order to intensify and maximise the extraction of surplus value, and the implementation of disciplinary practices for the purpose of reproducing the capitalist social order.[74] In

[67] Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifesto*, pp15-20, Karl Marx, *Capital*, pp448-450
[68] Karl Marx, *Capital*, pp 1036-1037& Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp408-409 & 770
[69] Karl Marx, *Capital*, pp1019-1038
[70] *Ibid.*, pp1019-1023
[71] *Ibid.*, pp1019-1023 & 1025-1029
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] *Ibid.*, pp1023-1025 & 1034-1038
[74] *Ibid.*, Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, (Autonomedia, Brooklyn, 1991), pp91-92, 113, &121-123 Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 2001), pp254-256 & Kenneth Surin, "Now Everything Must be Reinvented: Negri &

short, the entirety of social organisation is geared around the production process of capitalism. The relevant point here is that through the real subsumption of labour to capital both the working class, and the collective capitalist class, are reproduced as capital expands.[75] Thus, for Marx, "capitalist production" is both "the production and reproduction of the specifically capitalist relations of production."[76] To this extent, then, capitalism transformed social classes into the proletariat and the capitalist.

This aspect of capitalist production, that is, the necessary production and reproduction of the opposed and antagonistic class forces of the proletariat and capitalist, and the expansive tendency of capitalism, implies that in certain respects capitalism is a totalising system, producing universal subjects.[77] The proletariat, for Marx, is a universal subject, who struggles against the imposition of capitalist production, and the reduction of life to work.[78] As such, Marx saw the proletariat as the living subject of capitalist production, and as the revolutionary class capable of transforming capitalism into a freer and classless communist society.[79] Moreover, it was the immediate struggle against capitalism which would create communism, for,

> Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.[80]

This formulation of the class struggle of the proletariat implies an open ended process in the development of a free society – or communism. Similarly, this quote indicates that class struggle is an immanent project, developing from within the autonomous struggles of workers beyond the limits of capital. Thus, the abolition of wage-labour and capitalist relations involves the dissolution of all forms of hierarchy, exploitation and oppression.

Revolution", in Timothy S. Murphy & Abdul-Karim Mustapha, *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Resistance in Practice*, (Pluto Press, London, 2005), pp205-209

[75] Karl Marx, *Capital*, pp1034-1036, & Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifesto*, pp21-23

[76] Karl Marx, *Capital*, pg1060

[77] Karl Marx, *Manifesto*, Gregor McLennan, *Op Cit.*, & Tim Jordan, *Reinventing Revolution: Value and Difference in New Social Movements and the Left*, (Avebury, Aldershot, 1994), pp11-25

[78] Karl Marx, *Capital*, pp929-930 & Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, pp67-68, 147-148 & 165-167

[79] Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifesto*, pp21-27 & Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology" in David McLellan, *Op Cit.*, pp179-183

[80] *Ibid.*, p171

Here, it is evident that the class struggle, or the struggle for communism, can take many forms and occupy many spaces.

However, the reading of Marx, which emphasises the totalising effects of capitalist production, has resulted in the proletariat being theorised and conceived in reductive and homogenising terms.[81] Rather than recognising diversity and difference within the vast majority of people subjugated and oppressed by capitalist social relations, the proletariat of the classical labour movement often came to represent the negation of difference within the working class. Thus, subjectivities constructed outside of the traditional labour movement were often excluded from immediate recognition within the revolutionary struggle. Throughout the classical labour movement sections of the working class went unrecognised, as a result of their position within, or exclusion from, the immediate production process.[82] The struggles of women and the lumpenproletariat, for example, were subordinate to the privileged struggle between the waged proletariat and the capitalist class.[83] Finally, dissident perspectives held by sections of the working class, criticising the hegemony of the traditional and dominant workers' organisations of the party and union, were marginalised and sometimes crushed.[84] As such, for many, the concept of class has come to be synonymous with the industrial proletariat, and class struggle with the violent failure of the Soviet State.

The late 1970s through until the early 1990s saw the concept of class abandoned and attacked by many politics.[85] Many from the left criticised and rejected class as an

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[81] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in David McLellan, *Op Cit.*, Les Johnston, *Marxism Class Analysis & Socialist Pluralism*, (Allen & Unwin, London, 1986), pp85-121, & Gregor McLennan, *Op Cit.*,

[82] Mariarosa Dalla Costa & Selma James, *The Power of Women & The Subversion of the Community*, (Falling Wall Press Ltd, Bristol, 1975), pp15-20

[83] *Ibid.*

[84] Emma Goldman, "Why I left Russia" and Alexander Berkman, "The Bolshevik Myth" in Paul Avrich (ed.), *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, (Thames & Hudson, London, 1973), pp163-166

[85] Tim Jordan, *Op Cit.*, pp11-35, Donatella Della Porta & Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction 2nd Edition*, (Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2006), pp1-5, Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 2002), Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 2005), p86, &Verity Burgmann, *Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation*, (Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003) pp22-42

antagonistic force within social relations.[86] There are numerous reasons for the decline of class politics as a militant component of the theoretical trajectories of some on the left.[87] For many, the decline of the classical labour movement and the failure of the Soviet state created profound disillusion with working class politics.[88] Similarly, within many of the capitalist states, the representative bodies of the workers' movement, such as trades unions and labour parties, are seen to have become integrated into the managerial roles of capitalist social relations.[89] The homogeneity of the classical labour movement, and the construction of the industrial proletariat as the hegemonic figure of the revolutionary struggle, alienated many people from the movement.[90] The bureaucratic structures of labour organisations, from political parties to trades unions, came under heavy criticism during the rise of the New Left throughout the 1960s and 1970s.[91] Finally, the Information Technology (IT) revolutions in production have lead some on the left to argue that the restructuring in the workforce has meant the disappearance of the working class. Accordingly, for these theorists, this has meant the disappearance of class struggle as a component in the revolutionary movement.[92]

Class as a Political Concept

The theoretical tools and methods of Autonomist Marxism are useful for understanding class beyond the homogenous subject often identified in Marx's work. For Autonomist Marxism, class is not understood as a static and passive role imposed by the form of work one does, or their position within the economy and production process.[93] Rather, class is constructed as a political concept that is composed immanently during the

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[86] Andre Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, (Pluto Press, London & Sydney, 1982), Donatella Della Porta & Mario Diani, *Op Cit.* pp52-62, Danny Burns, Colin C. Williams & Jan Windebank, *Community Self-Help*, (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2004)
[87] Verity Burgman, *Op Cit.*
[88] *Ibid.*, Stanley Aronowitz, *How Class Works: Power and Social Movement*, (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2003), pp 155-156, Carl Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West*, (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1986),
[89] Antonio Negri, *Capitalist Domination and Working Class Sabotage*, URL www.libcom.org/library-negri-domination-sabotage Wildcat, *Outside & Against the Unions*, (Treason Press, Canberra, 2002)
[90] Tim Jordan, *Op Cit.*, pp25-35
[91] Stanley Aronowitz, *Op Cit.*, pp141-171
[92] Andre Gorz, *Op Cit.*
[93] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, pp65-69, Sergio Bologna, "The Tribe of Moles" in Sylvere Lotringer & Christian Marazzi, "*Italy*: *Autonomia, Post-Political Politics*, (Semiotext, New York, 1980)

struggle against capital.[94] This understanding of class places emphasis on Marx's assertion that class struggle, specifically the working class' refusal of capitalist relations, is the primary engine of capitalist development.[95] The immediate conflict between workers and capital illustrates the many tools and strategies that the working class develops and employs in order to resist the capitalist form of work.[96] In general terms this is called the 'refusal of work', and involves strikes, go slows, absenteeism, sabotage and reappropriation, amongst other practices.[97] In response, capital undertakes numerous measures to gain and re-gain control over production, and stabilise the market. General examples of this are sackings, restrucuration, and the utilisation of new machinery and technology to replace labour practices formerly undertaken by living-labour.[98] Through this ongoing process of conflict both the proletariat and capital are composed in new and dynamic forms, but always in antagonism to one another.[99] Upon this basis, it is clear to see that class is not a static identity, but a political form that changes as the context of the class struggle shifts through differing productive paradigms.

Drawing on Marx's work on real subsumption, Autonomist Marxists developed theses that addressed what they called the 'social factory'.[100] The social factory referred to the condition of capitalism in which not only had capitalist production relations been completely imposed on the immediate site of production, but also that social life in general had come to be subordinate to the circulation of capital.[101] Thus, the general conditions of everyday life, and the array of forms of work carried out, whether high, low or completely un-waged, are proletarianised.[102] To this extent, then, it becomes impossible to theorise class and exclude un-waged labour, students, and the unemployed

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[94] *Ibid.*, Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, (Theory Out of Bounds, Minneapolis, 1999), pp251-268
[95] Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, p73, Antonio Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*, pp97-152, Mario Tronti, "Workers and Capital" *Telos* no.14, Winter 1972, pp25-62
[96] Mario Tronti, *The Strategy of Refusal*, URL: http://www;libcom.org/library/tronti-social-factory
[97] *Ibid.*, & Antonio Negri, *Domination & Sabotage*
[98] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, p66
[99] *Ibid.*, pp66-73
[100] Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, p93, Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005) pp89-93 & Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx & Politics*, (Routledge, London, 2003)
[101] *Ibid.*
[102] Harry Cleaver, *Autonomy, Work & Refusal: An Interview with Harry Cleaver* http://www.eco.utexas:80/Homepages/Faculty/Claver/index2.html

and marginalised sections of society from the general conception of the working class.[103] Moreover, it becomes unthinkable to theorise class struggle and democratic practice whilst neglecting the autonomous struggles of different sections of the class. Therefore the social factory constitutes the condition whereby all forms of labour, and general social relations, are incorporated into the reproduction, and refusal, of the capitalist order. As such, the reproduction and refusal of capitalist social relations occurs within and beyond what has traditionally been understood as the immediate point of production – beyond the classical conception of class.[104]

As the circulation of capital has come to determine broader aspects of social life to a point of near total subsumption of labour to capital, the struggles against this determination come to manifest against the social factory of capital.[105] In this context, many struggles which are not traditionally understood as working class, and may not be anti-capitalist, can still be viewed through the theoretical prism of the social factory, and thus assume characteristics of class, understood as a political concept. As Nick Dyer-Witheford states,

> With the deepening subsumption of labour, the collision is not limited to that between workers and companies, but involves entire communities and a capitalist order increasingly mediated by state intervention.[106]

The realities of this situation extend the class conflict beyond the immediately waged workplace. Again, as Dyer-Witheford states, struggle now places in question,

> Not just the wage but the social wage; not just productive but reproductive labour; not just the shopfloor but education and culture; not just industrial hazards but environmental pollution.[107]

Thus, singular struggles at any particular site are imbued with the potential for a common basis of struggle in the context of the social factory. Here, a pluralistic basis is recognised for the development of class struggle, which moves beyond the homogenous unity of the classical proletariat and the division of identity movements.

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[103] Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Op Cit.*
[104] *Ibid.*
[105] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Autonomist Marxism*, (Treason Press, Canberra, 2002), p8, originally published as "Autonomist Marxism and the Information Society" in *Capital & Class*, Iss.52, 1994
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] *Ibid.*

The multitude, a term popularised by Hardt and Negri,[108] has been constructed by some as the subject of contemporary class composition; as a form of struggle, and as a form of organisation.[109] The multitude is relevant here in so far as it is an attempt to theorise class in terms that capture and accentuate the singularities of struggle in the social factory, whilst recognising multiplicity and commonality.[110] From a political perspective, the multitude as a class concept articulates the irreducibility of proletarian experience to a totalised and unified figure – to a homogenous subject.[111] Rather, through the multitude an array of political struggles relate and communicate with one another, contributing to the formation of the multitude as a coherent subject in struggle.[112] However, it is necessary to acknowledge that the contemporary conception of the multitude is based upon the freedom and autonomy of many, and therefore its formation as a subject in struggle is not synonymous with the totalising process of unity and generality.[113] The practice of the multitude is therefore inherently diverse, and open ended, that is, not containable within the bounds of political representation and totality. The multitude as a class concept helps to provide an alternative to the homogenous figure of classical Marxism, and also to the isolation of identity politics.

Understanding class as a political concept allows for the recognition of both the totalising effects of capitalist production and reproduction, that is the concept of class

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[108] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, pp381-413, Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, pp & Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, (Semiotexte, Los Angeles, 2004),

[109] *Ibid.*

[110] Singularity represents a moment and experience of revolt, power and liberation, emerging from struggle against capital. What it is necessary to remember is that these singularities do not manifest in divisions. Singularity only becomes division and hierarchical when it is fixed and privatised, thus being separated from the 'pluralistic common'. Division implies a fixed form of identity and experience, managed through oppression. Multiplicity refers to the linking of these singularities through the process of struggle. Multiplicity denotes the common basis upon which singular moments of revolt communicate. Harry Cleaver's concept of the "circulation of struggle" is a useful tool for understanding how singularity and multiplicity are expressed through commonality. The circulation of struggle is dealt with at more length in the *Organisation and Democracy* section in this chapter of this thesis, on pg. See Harry Cleaver, *Interview*, Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire,* Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, & Nicholas Thoburn, *Op Cit.*

[111] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, pp222-227

[112] *Ibid.*

[113] *Ibid.*

associated with the homogenous proletariat, and also the recognition of difference and diversity within the class. As Hardt and Negri explain, class as a universal subject is relevant to the extent that capital continues to subsume economies and proletarianise all forms of work.[114] Similarly, class as a pluralistic and diverse concept is equally true, in so far as all experiences of capitalist society, all autonomous struggles against capital, come to inform the composition of the class in struggle.[115] In this instance, each singular experience of life reduced to the circulation of capital creates the foundation for the formation of the class struggle.[116] Further, these singularities are multiple, and thus class can be understood as a multiplicity of singular experiences of insubordination to capitalist command, each informing one another through struggle.

The Meaning of Autonomy

Theorising class in terms of singularity and multiplicity, whilst aiming to accentuate the relationship between them, involves placing the question of autonomy at the heart of the problem. It is clear that the question of autonomy was influential in the rise of social movements, and the rejection of the hegemony and homogenising tendencies of the classical labour movement. The proliferation of diverse struggles rested upon the recognition of the autonomy of various movements and experiences of oppression. Moreover, it has become central to a number of contemporary theories of class, struggle and organisation.[117] Yet, it is apparent that the question of autonomy needs to be engaged on a higher level than as a conception of simple independence. Indeed, autonomy needs to be understood in terms that recognise the relationship between political autonomy and commonality, as a basis for democratic practice.

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[114] *Ibid.*
[115] *Ibid.*, pp104-105
[116] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber Marx*, pp68-72
[117] *Ibid.*, Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, pp219-227, Jose Rabasa, "Negri By Zapata: Constituent Power & the Limits of Autonomy" in Timothy S. Murphy & Abdul-Karim Mustapha, *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Resistance in Practice*, (Pluto Press, London, 2005)

One key foundation for the understanding of political and class autonomy is rooted in the antagonistic class relations of the capitalist order, and capitalist command wielded through exchange value.[118] Capital necessarily reduces all commodities to an exchange value,[119] and by doing so attempts to objectify and incorporate the working class as an amount of labour-power.[120] From "the perspective of autonomy", however, this reduction and reification of the class is always incomplete. Rather, the working class, as the living, subjective component of production, always exists beyond the reified object of labour-power.[121] Therefore, not only is the working class the creative force within the production process, but has its own self-interests beyond its reduction to labour-power for capital. The working class is the autonomous and creative element of production, and also an ontological subject embodying its own self-interests. Upon these foundations, the class struggle is not only waged over the conditions of the reified object of labour-power, but through the self-valorisation of the autonomous self-interests of the class, identified throughout its experiences of insubordination.

From a political perspective, autonomy has meant more than independence and individuality. Indeed, the concept of autonomy is often articulated as a social relation, necessarily dependent upon mutual recognition of autonomy between relevant subjects, for example, "individuals are never autonomous: they depend on external recognition."[122] Thus, autonomy is rooted in collective practice, "a way of acting collectively" and a politics which is "anti-hierarchic, anti-dialectic [and] anti-representative."[123] Yet, whilst it is necessary to understand political autonomy as a collective practice, it is equally important, as Christian Marazzi explains, "to understand that what is called 'autonomous movement' is anything but homogenous."[124] To this extent then, struggles based upon

[118] Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, p61
[119] For Marx's discussion of the relationships between use and exchange value see the sections of *Capital vol.1* pp138-187, and the *Grundrisse*, pp8810882 For a discussion of how exchange value can be understood as a central method of capitalist command see Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, pp62-63, & Harry Cleaver, *Reading capital Politically*, pp139-140
[120] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, pp65-69
[121] *Ibid*.
[122] Sylvere Lotringer & Christian Marazzi, "The return of Politics" in *Italy: Autonomia, Post-Political Politics*, (Semiotexte, New York, 1980)
[123] *Ibid*.
[124] *Ibid*.

theories of political autonomy form out of diverse and sometimes conflicting experiences. Thus, autonomy is based upon an intimate relationship between the individual and the collective.

It is once again useful to utilise the theoretical tools of Autonomist Marxism to engage with the concept of political autonomy. Political autonomy opens the question of power, and how it is wielded. Focusing on the living subject of capital, Autonomist Marxism sought to focus on the immediate struggles of the working class, and what this implied for class power.[125] As Harry Cleaver articulates, "autonomy" refers to

> The autonomous power of workers – autonomous from capital, from their official organisations, (e.g. the trades unions, the political parties) and, indeed, the power of particular groups of workers to act autonomously from other groups (e.g. women from men).[126]

This conception of autonomy indicates the multiple sites from which class power arises, for example from within the women's movement, or the struggles of the unemployed. Acknowledging the autonomy of the different struggles arising within the class, allows for the necessary recognition of divisions that manifest in the class. It is only through such acknowledgment that these divisions can be overcome.

The fact that there are a number of perspectives that arise out of the broader composition of the working class means that the identification of interests and needs is a central component of autonomous struggle. Following Cleaver again, autonomy means

> The ability of workers to define their own interests and to struggle for them – to go beyond mere reaction to exploitation, or to self-defined 'leadership' and to take the offensive in ways that shape the class struggle and define the future.[127]

It is evident that for each respective "group of workers" to maintain their autonomy, their self-identified interests and demands cannot be made subordinate to a generalised, abstracted, and homogenous subject or political trajectory – for example the historical struggle of the classical proletariat. Rather, the democratic expression of autonomous

[125] Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, pp54-56 Antonio Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*,pp218-221 Harry Cleaver, *Autonomy, Work & Refusal: An Interview with Harry Cleaver* http://www.eco.utexas:80/Homepages/Faculty/Claver/index2.html
[126] Harry Cleaver, *Autonomy, Work & Refusal*, p2
[127] *Ibid*,

class struggle, necessarily involves allowing contradictions within the class to express themselves whilst aiming for commonality. In this instance, the experiences of class struggle cannot be synthesised within an overarching and representative organisation.

Democracy & Organisation

Sarah Maddison's and Sean Scalmer's recent work on Australian activists indicates that the understanding of democracy throughout the Australian left varies widely, and yet democracy is often invoked when struggling for more freedom.[128] Engaging the question of organisation and democracy is a difficult problem, necessarily based in a complex relationship between homogeneity and heterogeneity, or unity and difference.[129] As Francesca Polletta states, "democracy has always been a concept at once radical and ambiguous."[130] The question of democracy and organisation needs to be considered in two ways: democratic methods within the organisation, and the relationship between the organisation and those outside of it. The formation of an organisation necessarily involves the acknowledgement of a political or spatial boundary that delimits the constituency of the organisation, distinct from other organisations and politics.[131] To this extent a political organisation operates or constitutes a specific political space, defined by an ensemble of relational dynamics. Within such a political space democracy can assume varying forms and practices, for example, majority rule voting systems, democratic centralist structures, or consensus decision making procedures. In another respect, the role an organisation assumes within the social struggle determines the democratic nature of its relationship with the broader participants in struggle.

The concept of democratic centralism refers to a principle of democratic practice and organisation, and is most commonly associated with the Leninist party.[132] The

[128] *Ibid.*
[129] Sarah Maddison & Sean Scalmer *Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements*, (UNSW Press, NSW, 2006), pp99-112, Verity Burgman, *Op Cit.*,
[130] Francesca Polletta, *Op Cit.*, pvii
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] Michael Waller, *Democratic Centralism: A Historical Commentary*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1981), pp4-15, & Neil Harding, *Leninism*, (Macmillan Press, London, 1996) & Christopher Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, (Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1971)

principle of democratic centralism allows for significant degrees of debate and discussion within the organisation. This degree of debate and scope for disagreement constitutes the foundation of democracy for democratic centralism.[133] Indeed, the unlimited amount of debate within the organisation, theoretically, increases the effectiveness of the organisation's practice.[134] Through establishing channels for democratic participation throughout the organisation, the leadership, in principle, is informed to the greatest extent possible of the most appropriate course of action. The centralist component of democratic centralism is constituted by the hierarchical structure within the organisation, and by the binding nature of majority rule decisions upon the entire membership.[135] According to Lenin, the highest body within the party is the central committee, responsible for theoretical, strategic and tactical leadership of the party and the movement.[136]

As noted above, democratic centralism is most commonly associated with Leninism, and the Leninist party. From the Leninist perspective, the party constitutes the most specialised section of class movement.[137] The vanguardist politics articulated by a Leninist party illustrates a specific conception of the relationship between the organisation and the 'masses'. Whilst the working class may struggle against "the employers and the government", such an "economistic" struggle does not provide a solid foundation for the revolutionary project.[138] The class organisations that develop to wage such struggles, such as strike committees, are "insufficient to create the level of political consciousness…to overthrow capitalist rule."[139] Rather, what is needed is a specialised organisation of trained revolutionaries, to articulate and lead the specifically political struggle of the proletariat.[140] There is a distinct separateness here, between the 'objective' knowledge of the Party, and the autonomous experience of the class. The Party's internal

[133] S.V. Utechin, "Introduction" in V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?,* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1963)
[134] *Ibid.* pp15-27, Michael Waller, *Op Cit.,* & Neil Harding, *Op Cit.*,
[135] *Ibid.*
[136] V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*,
[137] V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*,
[138] V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1951), pp186-187
[139] Democratic Socialist Party, *Program of the Democratic Socialist Party 2nd ed.*,
[140] V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done Burning Questions of Our Movement?* & V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, (Unwin Books, London,)pp

hierarchy and specialisation, transfers into the party's specialised leadership over the class struggle.[141]

What is significant in this formulation is the construction of a dichotomy between the cultivation of democratic practice within the specialised revolutionary organisation, and the organisational initiatives arising from within the generalised struggle.[142] In this formulation, the highest expression of democratic practice does not emerge from the experience of the immediate struggle between the class and capital. Rather, according to the Leninist principle, the highest expression of democratic struggle is necessarily introduced from outside of the class, from the party.[143] Such a position necessarily maintains that there is a distinct separateness between the political functioning of the party and other elements of the class struggle. In fact, democratic practice is essentially limited by the formulation of democratic centralism and the relationship between the Party and the class struggle. Democratic practice is effectively replaced by a 'rational' and 'objective' knowledge of socialist truth contained within the Party, existing beyond the grasp of those involved in the everyday struggles against capital.[144] Finally, the unity that is necessary for the Party to operate as a single, unified, representative and leadership organisation negates the recognition of difference throughout the movement.

Many organisations of the New Left sought to challenge the structures and relationships associated with Leninism and vanguardist politics. This has involved challenging the democratic procedures of democratic centralism, as well as initiating organisation throughout different sections of society, acknowledging the autonomy of each struggle. The concept of pre-figurative and anti-organisational politics is often used to describe this form of organisation, which aims at practicing complete democracy

[141] Neil Harding, *Op Cit.*,
[142] Rosa Luxemburg, *Russian Revolution & Marxism or Leninism?*, (University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1970),
[143] Michael Waller, *Op Cit.*
[144] Dave Eden, "Treasonous Minds: Capital & Universities, the Ideology of the Intellectual & the Desire for Mutiny", *ephemera*, vol.5, no4, 2005, pp580-594

within the organisation, for a "revolution in the here and now".[145] In this formulation, the organisation itself is seen to embody the goal of the movement. Participatory democracy is a key component of pre-figurative politics.[146] As Wini Breines states, pre-figurative politics embodies "personal and anti-hierarchical values in politics."[147] Participatory democracy here is constructed as an alternative to the hierarchical structures of organisation, through attempting to involve all members in decision-making. Common characteristics of prefigurative political organisations are a minimal division of labour, decentralisation, and an "egalitarian ethos, whose decision making is direct and consensus oriented."[148] A significant amount of literature examining contemporary forms of radical organisation illustrate that a pre-figurative politics characterises many current movements.[149] It is clear that this conception of organisation places democratic practice as the highest priority, with emphasis on the immediate commitment to democracy.

Analysts and critics of pre-figurative politics have argued that organisations and individuals committed to a pre-figurative politics often fail to make any strategic gains.[150] Whilst these critics credit pre-figurative politics with affecting personal or cultural change, this is offset by the inability to attain concrete "political" victories such as changes in political structures.[151] The core of this argument is that the pre-occupation with attempting to practice a full democracy at all times prevents acting in ways necessary for effective struggle.[152] Whilst non pre-figurative organisations may reproduce some bureaucratic or hierarchical structures within their organisation, this is seen as a necessary aspect of effective struggle.[153] Alternatively, it is argued that even when all formal positions of authority are dissolved within organisations committed to

[145] Wini Breines, *Community and Organisation in the New Left 1962-1968: The Great Refusal*, (Praeger, New York, 1982), p54, Cynthia Kaufman, *Ideas for Action: Relevant theory for Social Change*, 277-278, & Francesca Polletta, *Op Cit.*
[146] Francesca Polletta, *Ibid.*
[147] Wini Breines, *Op Cit.* cited in Cynthia Kaufman, *Op Cit.*, p278
[148] Francesca Polletta, *Op Cit.*, pp6-7, 205-208, & 233
[149] *Ibid*.
[150] *Ibid.*
[151] *Ibid.*
[152] *Ibid.*
[153] *Ibid.*

participatory democracy, informal hierarchies develop.[154] In this instance, subtle hierarchical relationships come to replace the formal relationships of non-prefigurative organisations, such as clique rule. The strongest criticism of pre-figurative politics is that they become removed from relating to broader participants in social or class struggle through becoming so opposed to every aspect of practices that reflect the status quo.[155]

Although authors such as Polletta and Ricardo Blaug have shown that a commitment to participatory democracy, and as such a certain element of pre-figurative politics, is not necessarily at odds with "strategic" struggles or with engaging the broader class, there is a clear problem with a strict pre-figurative politics.[156] This problem is found in the tendency to reproduce the separation between a pure sphere of democratic practice and knowledge within the organisation, opposed to practices emerging from outside of that delimited political space. This is a dialectical problem, found between the relationship between the many desires and differences found throughout the struggle, and the one unified representative form of the organisation.[157] Whilst the practice of democracy in pre-figurative politics differs radically from the principle of democratic centralism, in terms of relating to those outside of the organisation there remain some similarities. In both instances, elements of leadership based relationships develop between the organisation and the broader struggle. Where many studies have shown that the community mindedness of pre-figurative politics provides an effective basis for participation and interaction with many people, there remains a vertical separation between the organisation and the class.

In attempting to overcome the problems of representation, hierarchy and the separation between the organisation and the broader class, a re-invention of the concept of the commons has been utilised by some theorists dealing with radical democracy.[158] As a result of "hyper-subsumption", or an intensified real subsumption of labour to

[154] *Ibid*.
[155] *Ibid.*
[156] *Ibid.*, & Ricardo Blaug, *Op Cit.*
[157] Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, (Theory Out of Bounds, Minneapolis, 1999), pp304-306
[158] Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Species-being and the New Commonism: Notes on an Interrupted Cycle of Struggles" in *The Commoner*, n.11, Spring, 2006, pp15-32

capital, a multiplicity, or "diversity of agencies", is produced within, and potentially against, contemporary relations of capital.[159] Whilst this theory accepts totalising tendencies of capital, the understanding of subjectivity and class does not follow the homogenous understanding of the proletariat. Rather, capital is understood as recognising and managing difference within a regime of control,[160] whilst resistance assumes a pluralistic form. The common is formed and articulated through the material basis of contemporary capital, and through a form of communicative action linking the diverse experiences of struggle.[161] Moreover, the articulation, and organisation, of the common, cannot assume fixed forms of organisation, instead remaining an open ended process of struggle and creation. In this formulation democracy becomes an immanent praxis of struggle within the social factory.

As indicated above, communication is a key organisational component of democratic practice rooted in this contemporary understanding of the common. Here, an open interaction between "singularities" of struggle, that is different instances of revolt, produce common practices linking the movements.[162] It is evident that this understanding of democratic organisation retains elements of pre-figurative politics. With pre-figurative politics communication and deliberation were inherent to the practice of participatory democracy within the organisation. However, the formation of the organisation was also characterised by the establishment of fixed practices, thus difference was subsumed by a community, that is totalised, identity.[163] What is important for pre-figurative politics is that the emphasis falls on the establishment of the "community", whereas with the commons, the emphasis falls to the communication between struggles. That is, singularity does not dissolve into the common, but both expresses and is expressed by the common. This conception of singularity and commonality is seen as a relation that supersedes the division between the homogenous/difference based movements of the past.

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[159] *Ibid.*
[160] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, p
[161] Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Species-being", Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, & Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*,
[162] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, pp204-205
[163] Mario Diani, "Direct Democracy & Leadership in Social Movement Networks", in Pedro Ibarra, *Social Movements & Democracy*, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003), pp47-57

Establishing a concrete understanding of democratic organisation and practice upon the concept of the commons is an elusive and difficult problem.[164] The practice is based in the concept of political and class autonomy discussed above. This involves a rejection of representative and dialectical politics, developing instead as an immanent project. Organisation assumes forms that are anti-hierarchical, anti-representative, collective and decentralised.[165] Self-organisation is a term often used to describe practices of organisations associated with the commons. Through self-organisation, participants directly engage in struggle themselves, organising on their own terms, and retain autonomy from any overarching structure.[166] These collectives and groups generally embody a non-hierarchical participatory democracy within the organisation, indicating similarities with New Left pre-figurative politics.[167] The collectives are often small compared to traditional organisations, acting together on common foundations without forming into a fixed organisation.

Theories of network struggles, and the circulation of struggle, assist in understanding how autonomous, self-organised collectives and movements develop beyond isolated, difference based trajectories.[168] According to network theory, organisation and struggle is based on an ongoing process of pluralisation of points of conflict and organisation.[169] It is clear here, that struggle and organisation develop centrifugally rather than towards a single leadership organisation.[170] It is through the process of struggle that increasing points of conflict and organisation arise, thus the pluralistic basis of struggle expands. In this understanding of autonomous struggle,

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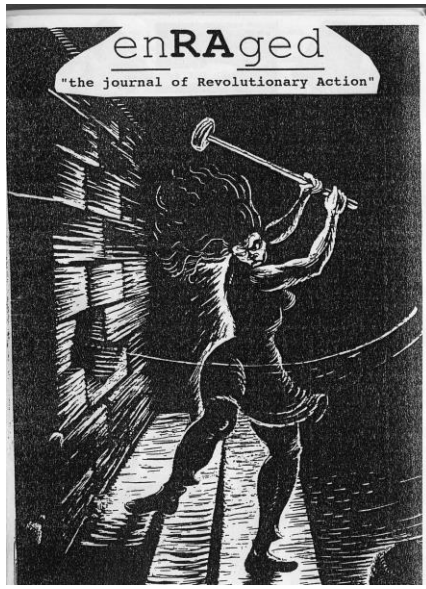
[164] Jodi Dean "The Networked Empire: Communicative Capitalism and the Hope For Politics" in Paul A. Passavant & Jodi Dean, *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*, (Routledge, New York, 2004),
[165] Sylvere Lotringer & Christian Marazzi, *Op Cit.*
[166] Kevin Macdonald, *Op Cit.*, Harry Cleaver, *Interview*, Notes From Nowhere, *Op Cit.*, Michael Haedt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, & Ricardo Blaug, *Op Cit.*
[167] *Ibid.*
[168] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996), Harry Cleaver, *Autonomy, Work & Refusal*, & Kenneth Surin, "Now Everything Must Be Reinvented: Negri & Revolution" in Timothy S. Murphy & Abdul-Karim Mustapha (eds.), *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Resistance in Practice*, (Pluto Press, London, 2005), pp216-219, & Jodi Dean, *Op Cit.*
[169] Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, pp & Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*, (Pluto Press, London, 2004)
[170] Alternatively, a centripetal organisation implies that a separate, 'transcendental' organisation homogenises subjectivity within the sovereign. This effectively negates democracy through synthesising difference within the imposed unity of the sovereign. See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*

"power dissolves into a network of powers."[171] The circulation of struggle denotes the process by which singular struggles spread throughout the class. Here, democratic organisation is posed as the problem of finding ways through which to organise relationships between self defined groups and struggles.[172] It is evident that understanding class involves recognising difference throughout the class and therefore numerous forms of resistance. The project of the circulation of struggle is one of reinforcing a mutually supportive diversity through the process of struggle.[173] This point produces the paradox whereby class "unity will be the product of moments of power which are pluralistic."[174]

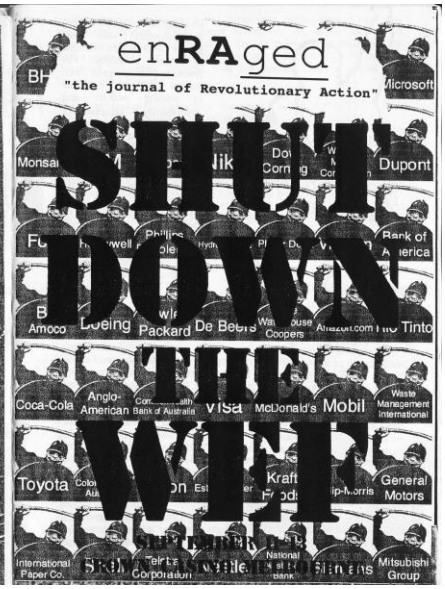
This chapter discussed theories of class, autonomy and radical democracy, and dealt with the relationship between them. The central theme that characterised the overall discussion was the relationship between homogeneity and unity, and heterogeneity and difference. Introducing the political and class concept of autonomy provided a tool for dealing with this problem. Theorising class within the social factory involved recognising diversity throughout the class and the struggles waged by different sections of it. Here class was defined as a political concept that is composed throughout the process of struggle against capital. Autonomy refers to the overall independence of proletarian self-interest beyond capital, and of the singularity of respective struggles. Finally, democracy was dealt with as a process of articulating the relationship between class struggle and autonomy. The following chapter will examine the ways in which RA engaged with the theories discussed here: did RA theorise class as a mode of political struggle? How did RA practice democracy?

[171] Michael Ryan, "Epilogue", in Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, p215
[172] Harry Cleaver, *Work, Autonomy & Refusal*
[173] *Ibid.*
[174] Michael Ryan, *Op Cit.*, p215

Chapter 4



Issue #3 of *enRAged*



Issue #2 of *enRAged*

"RA is for people who call themselves anarchists, socialists, communists or whatever, to come together and fight against capitalism and its effects…Within the boundaries that the collective explicitly believes, that the way to create a better world is through revolutionary workers' self-liberation, the greatest amount of pluralism and debate is encouraged."

From, *"What is 'Revolutionary Action'?"*

Revolutionary Action: Organisation, Democracy & Class

'Revolutionary Action' formed in 1999 prior to the November WTO Seattle protests, and dissolved over the course of 2004. During this time RA was involved in many political actions, campaigns, broader collectives, and an ongoing, internal political development. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of RA's practice of radical democracy, and RA's engagement with the problems of unity and difference in terms of organisation. This chapter will examine RA's organisational praxis, based on its engagement with the concepts of class, autonomy and democracy, discussed in the previous chapter. This examination will answer the questions of how did RA theorise class as a political concept; how did RA practice democracy, and to what

extent was the concept of autonomy influential on RA's praxis? The previous chapter examined the ways in which theories of class influence organisation, and how the role that an organisation assumes within the struggle affects its democratic practice. Based on the examples of these relationships, this chapter will illustrate to what extent the organisational experience of RA can assist in understanding radical democratic practice.

Formation: RA as a Political Space

Revolutionary Action formed on the 9th of August 1999, out of a group that was reading the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.[175] Although there was only four members at the formation of the collective, within a short time there was a number of people involved in the collective, many of them young.[176] RA was made up of employed workers, unemployed workers and students. The desire to "do something" and participate in the struggles in Wollongong on a radical, democratic basis characterised many of the interviewee's initial engagement with RA, whether they were founding members or joined later.[177] A number of the RA participants interviewed had significant experience with the Australian left prior to their involvement with RA. These individuals had been involved in organisations ranging from Wollongong Out of Workers' Union (WOW), the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, International Socialist Organisation (ISO), the Democratic Socialist Party, and Resistance.[178] In each of these cases there was a general sense of disillusionment with the organisational methods of the groups of which they were a part.[179] Similarly, the participants whose experience with RA was their first engagement with organised politics, had been familiar with some of the organisations mentioned above, and had not been persuaded by the politics of these groups. As such, these individuals were also looking to develop a politics on a democratic basis that was not embodied by any of the established organisations in Wollongong.[180]

[175] Revolutionary Action, *Time Line*, (See Appendix), Interview #2, Interview #6, Interview #8
[176] Interview #8
[177] Interview #4, Interview #5, Interview #8
[178] Interview #2, Interview #3, Interview #6, Interview #7, Interview #8
[179] Interview #2 Interview#8, Interview #3, Interview #7
[180] Interview, #1, Interview, #4, Interview, #5

As was discussed in the previous chapter, organisational politics associated with autonomous self-organisation, and also with pre-figurative politics, often seek to embody within the organisation, the liberatory principles and relationships that the organisation is trying to create throughout society.[181] A number of the interviewees expressed the idea that for RA, the organisation sought to reflect the social form it wanted to create through struggle with the working class. Interviewee #1 stated that, "with that sort of group it is not just an intellectual activity; you are actually trying to develop a new social form, maybe not a new one, but a more appropriate one."[182] For interviewee #2, RA needed to struggle for a radical and operational democratic practice because, "you cannot create in the future, what you have not struggled to create now."[183] Both Interviewees #7 and #8, stated "that we wanted to create a true democracy", whilst #8 also said, "that you cannot organise in a hierarchical way now, and expect to create a liberatory society."[184] Based upon these assertions, it is clear that participants in RA sought to organise themselves and the struggle in the most democratic and free way now, for "the revolution is happening now…in the way you organise."[185]

From a theoretical perspective, RA is located within the libertarian communist, and anarchist tendencies of revolutionary thought. This is evident within the founding documents of RA, throughout articles of *enraged*, and is articulated by the interviewees.[186] As one interviewee states, "we were influenced by the libertarian communist, anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, and revolutionary milieu of history. We didn't just come out of some intellectual vacuum."[187] Theoretical influences on RA ranged from Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Bakunin, Kropotkin, the Situationists, and Autonomists; an

[181] Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 2002), pp6-7, & Alisa Del Re, "Feminism & Autonomy: Itinerary of Struggle" in Timothy S. Murphy & Abdul-Karim Mustapha, *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Resistance in Practice*, (Pluto Press, London, 2005), p
[182] Interview, #1
[183] Interview, #2
[184] Interview, #7, Interview #8
[185] Interview, #8
[186] Interview #2, Interview #3, Interview #6, Interview, #7, Simon Frew, "Revolution, Direct Action, Autonomy", *enRaged*, iss6
[187] Interview, #2

eclectic theoretical foundation reflecting the composition of the collective.[188] This eclecticism, however, was not viewed as a weakness; indeed, RA did not seek "exact positions" reflecting the entire constituency of the collective, maintaining that "open political debate within the collective will decide tactical and political questions as they arise."[189] This position itself, however, reflects RA's politics, and the collective's belief that revolutionary, "absolute democracy" is necessarily pluralistic, and arising from the diverse experiences of the class.[190] For these reasons, RA saw no separation between its internal democratic practice and the form of democracy to be cultivated throughout the workers' movement.

The formation of RA can be seen as a formalisation of a specifically radical politics, as a political space. Some participants in RA saw the collective as but one manifestation and expression of the diversity and fluidity of working class life and struggle:

> In our lives we have many political 'spaces' that are formed, collapse and maybe form again around us: some of these are explicit (collectives, unions, squats), some not so (friendships, dinner parties). RA is just one of them. What separates it is that it is formed on an explicitly revolutionary basis.[191]

RA formed as a revolutionary collective, creating relationships upon common beliefs and desires, through the process of struggle. Although RA was a specific, political space, it was not removed from the broader political relations of life. That is, within the social factory of capital, 'political' relations occur in numerous forms. Thus RA could not be a leadership organisation, but rather functioned as a common point for a number of people in struggle.[192] In this context, personal lives became intimately entwined with the experience of the collective. The majority of interviewees asserted that a central aspect of RA was the close, personal relationships of the people involved; that care and support were integral to RA's functioning.[193]

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[188] Revolutionary Action Public Meeting Flier, Interview, #2, Interview, #3, Interview, #6, Interview #7
[189] Revolutionary Action, *Program: Rules & Platform*
[190] *Ibid.*
[191] Dave Eden, *RA Email Archive*, www.groups.yahoo.com/group/revolutionary-action/, message #214
[192] *Ibid.*
[193] Interview, #1, Interview, #2, Interview, #4, Interview, #5, Interview, #6

However, this assertion does not apoliticise the experience of RA, nor reduces the collective to a general affinity group. At least one participant saw their involvement in RA as one of a specifically political commitment, rather than of affinity.[194] Moreover, a number of studies of pre-figurative political organisations, autonomous collectives and groups involved in contemporary struggle, indicate that personal relationships assume increasing political characteristics, as struggle against capital materialises throughout an array of spheres of life.[195] The project of autonomy, discussed in the previous chapter, illustrated that a central component of class struggle was the development of mutually supportive relationships within the class.[196] For participants in RA, this project was pursued both within the collective, and throughout the class struggle.

RA saw the revolutionary struggle as a common project between its own actions and needs and the broader interests of the working class and as a political organisation saw itself as a part of the left.[197] However, the decision to form RA was also a rejection of traditional, left organisational politics, and the forms of democratic organisation that they practiced.[198] Political parties, trades unions and the student union were the dominant organisational forces at the end of the 1990s in Wollongong. At a formal, organisational level, RA sought to confront the hierarchical, authoritarian, and bureaucratic relationships that defined life under capital in general, and that were reproduced within the structures of many left organisations.[199] Instead, through the formation of RA, participants sought to develop a democratic practice that was simultaneously inclusive and radical, in order to participate in the upturn in struggle evident throughout many parts of the world.[200]

Considering the points above, RA can be located within a theoretical, and historical, tendency of radical politics, which re-emerged globally throughout the

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[194] Interview, #7
[195] Kevin McDonald, *Global Movements: Action and Culture*, (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006), Notes From Nowhere (eds.), *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism*, (Verso, London, 2003)
[196] Harry Cleaver, *Autonomy, Work & Refusal: An Interview with Harry Cleaver* http://www.eco.utexas:80/Homepages/Faculty/Claver/index2.html
[197] Interview, #2
[198] Revolutionary Action, "How RA Organises", *enRAged*, iss5
[199] *Ibid.*
[200] Interview, #2, Interview, #6, Interview, #8

1990s.[201] This tendency placed in question the organisational apparatuses of hierarchical and authoritarian bodies.[202] This critique was levelled at organisations of the traditional left, as well as of life within the social factory of capital in total.[203] As a part of the struggle against these conditions of life, many individuals and groups sought to construct an anti-capitalist movement, which embodied and practiced liberatory potential whilst confronting capital.[204] For RA, this project assumed the form of organising the internal relations of the collective in a way that articulated autonomy, pluralism and commonality, whilst attempting to cultivate these same politics throughout the working class movement. These points illustrate both the commonality and distinctness at the basis of RA as a political space: the desire to develop a "new" form of revolutionary, democratic practice, which was not embodied by any other organisation in Wollongong at the time.

RA & 'Internal' Democratic Practice

The development and practice of revolutionary democracy was the key concern of the collective. The question of how to organise in a radically democratic way, based on revolutionary politics, whilst working in common with each other, the working class and other worker's organisations was at the foundation of RA's praxis.[205] A number of interviewees stated that democracy was the key question; "democracy was what we talked about"[206], or "democracy was the one thing that we had in common."[207] This focus on democracy constituted the common foundation for the collective, and as the organisation engaged with and developed their understanding of the concept, the relationship between autonomy, plurality and democratic organisation became clearer.

[201] Verity Burgmann, *Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation*, (Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003)
[202] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *The Circulation of the Common*, at http://geocites.com/immateriallabour/withefordpaper2006.html
[203] *Ibid.*
[204] Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Species-Being & the New Commonism: Notes on an Interrupted Cycle of struggles", in *The Commoner*, n11, Spring, 2006
[205] Revolutionary Action, *Program*, & Revolutionary Action, *What is Revolutionary Action?*, enRAged, iss5
[206] Interview, #6
[207] Interview, #8

This is reflected in both RA's internal organisational procedures, and in the relationships it sought to construct with other elements of the class struggle.

The founding members of RA collectively wrote, in order to articulate the common foundation of RA's conception of democratic practice and revolutionary struggle, the *Revolutionary Action Programme*, and document titled *'What is Revolutionary Action?'*[208] As such, these documents provide the basic framework of RA's internal democratic practice, and RA's general strategy for the development of radical democracy throughout the workers' movement. The article, "How RA Organises", states that the "platform's purpose is to create common ground to work from."[209] RA saw autonomy as a central political question of revolutionary democracy within the organisation and throughout the class struggle. From this perspective it was argued that through the recognition of plurality and diversity, a more creative and effective class struggle would develop. This is reflected in the statement that RA "believes that not one faction or tendency within the international revolutionary movement has a monopoly on truth for the way forward."[210] Rather, "the creation of the broadest possible solidarity between already existing revolutionary tendencies and promotion of debate around questions of organisation and revolutionary strategy" would constitute a higher degree of democracy.[211]

The question, and problem, of organisational membership and its affect on the relationship between unity, difference and democratic practice, is telling of RA's organisational praxis. In the initial stage of the formation of the collective, it was stated that the collective would have a formal membership.[212] Membership was open to anyone who agreed with the rules and principles of RA.[213] Theoretically, the membership constituted the central body of RA, and the general meeting was the primary democratic

[208] Interview, #2
[209] Revolutionary Action, "How RA Organises", *enRAged*, iss5
[210] Revolutionary Action, *Program*
[211] Nick Southall, "Revolutionary Action & Democracy", *enRAged*, iss2
[212] Interview, #2, Interview, #6
[213] Revolutionary Action, *Program*

organ of the collective.[214] RA's decision to make the general membership the highest power in the collective allowed members an equal democratic right in the decision making process, "power was effectively held by the membership".[215] It was also stated that one primary reason for the adoption of a membership was to "give the organisation some protection from antagonistic people or forces".[216] However, the formulation of membership resisted the tendency towards the development of a leadership separate from the general constituency of the collective, and of hierarchy and bureaucracy in RA. The location of power throughout the general membership prevented the formation of hierarchical structures. In practice, even membership was challenged as an institution within RA.

In practice, only one member was voted into the collective.[217] Whilst a number of people also joined as members, a significant amount of people in RA were 'participants' and not official members.[218] One RA member stated, "the borders of this political space called RA [were] greater than the membership."[219] The membership was complimented and supported by a significant amount of participants that were not actually members of the collective, yet were consistently involved with actions and debates that defined RA. For some, both members and participants, this distinction itself between members and non-members became superfluous over time.[220] Most importantly, interviewees, who were participants rather than members, never reported their lack of membership as a restrictive measure that hindered their level of involvement.[221] Indeed, RA's organisational practice actively confronted the development of an "informal leadership" of the collective based on "levels of commitment."[222] Non-member participants were not excluded "from taking on organisational tasks", in an attempt to reinforce the practice that placed democratic power on the terrain of "involvement" and

[214] Dave Eden, *Email Archive*, msg#214
[215] Revolutionary Action "How RA Organises", *enRAged*, iss5
[216] *Ibid.*
[217] Interview, #8
[218] Dave Eden, *Email Archive*, msg#214
[219] *Ibid.*
[220] In the history of the collective, there was only one vote, Interview, #2
[221] Interview, #1, Interview, #5
[222] Revolutionary Action, "How RA Organises", *Op Cit.*

"action", and "not on perceptions of who is the most knowledgeable, committed or experienced."[223] Simultaneously, the collective always aimed to reach consensus, allowing for the direct participation of non-members.[224] To this extent, then, even the membership was challenged as a hierarchical institution, in practice being replaced by the general meeting.

Internally, RA sought to develop practices that would produce the most democracy possible. This process involved aspects of pre-figurative and participatory politics outlined in the previous chapter.[225] RA effectively instituted three procedural mechanisms as one method of democratic organisation within the collective. Democratic practice within the collective operated through a combination of consensus, majority decision making, and the right to dissent.[226] In the first instance, the collective "always aimed to reach consensus" when making decisions within the collective.[227] In the situation where consensus could not be reached, a vote would be held. A vote in this instance was a "simple majority vote at a meeting of the collective."[228] However, given that this situation implies the existence of a minority, the collective was obliged to "recognise and defend minority positions."[229] Such recognition and defence involved the right to dissent, to "publicly oppose" majority positions of the collective, and "the freedom not to conform" to majority positions.[230] Throughout the experience of RA, only two of the decision making procedures were of central consequence. These were consensus decision making, and the right to form minority positions and factions.

The rights of minorities and factions were of high importance to RA's conception of democratic practice. The project of autonomous and self-organisation discussed in the previous chapter illustrated that relating divergent perspectives upon a

[223] Revolutionary Action, "How RA Organises", *Op Cit.*
[224] *Ibid.*
[225] Francesca Polletta, *Op Cit.*
[226] Revolutionary Action, "How RA Organises", *Op Cit.*
[227] *Ibid.*
[228] Revolutionary Action, *Program*
[229] *Ibid.*
[230] Revolutionary Action, "How RA Organises", *Op Cit.*

basis of commonality is a key question of democratic organisation.[231] Therefore, it is useful to illustrate how these problems worked within RA.

Although there was little significance placed on voting and the distinction between member/participant throughout RA's practice, one faction did form within the collective. Red Haze formed over a year into the operations of RA, by a minority group that wanted to protect its space within the collective, we "created RA to be part of RA, but to make sure our politics were seen as different".[232] "In Defence of Science", the article written by Red Haze in issue 3 of *enRAged*, indicates one point of contention for the faction.[233] This article maintains that an influence of radical green politics or a rejection of science, within RA, was illustrative of a weakening analysis on the part of some RA members.[234] One interviewee from Red Haze also felt that cultural differences between punk, and the underground electronic scene with which Red Haze identified, contributed to the formation of the faction.[235] Whilst it was stated that these "cultural conflicts" occurred outside of RA in its immediate form, but within the broader networks of the radical community, Red Haze felt it was necessary to distinguish itself within RA. However, although Red Haze formed out of the need the faction's members saw to define themselves autonomously from the generalised collective of RA, the faction none the less saw continued participation in RA as beneficial, and also practical.[236] Red Haze did not have a specific critique of RA, but rather of tendencies within RA, and viewed RA as a positive, useful medium for political activity.[237]

RA & 'External' Democratic Practice

[231] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 2005)
[232] Interview, #7
[233] Red Haze, "In Defence of Science", *enRAged*, Iss3 & interview, #7
[234] *Ibid.*
[235] Interview, #7
[236] *Ibid.*
[237] *Ibid*.

The previous discussion illustrated that RA's internal democratic practice embodied elements of pre-figurative politics, as well as a clear recognition of the concepts of autonomy and pluralism. RA attempted to reproduce these practices throughout its engagement with other organisations. In the article "Democracy and Revolutionary Action", it is stated that the "democratic revolutionary movement is the embryo of a new world and the instrument for achieving it."[238] In the attempt to cultivate democratic practice throughout the class struggle RA rejected hierarchical and leadership politics, whilst seeking to work with other organisations wherever common ground could be established.

RA's general recognition of the multiplicity of struggles, each in their own singularity, time and space, illustrates the collectives' recognition of autonomy throughout the class movement. This position is captured in the statement, "the revolutionary working class movement is built through everyday struggles against capitalist society and the power of the ruling class."[239] Rather than defining 'the' struggle upon a homogenous trajectory, of which people must be made aware and then join, RA attempted to institutionalise a politics of difference and diversity that could assist in circulating the struggles throughout the class and the generalised movement. From such a perspective, the idea of leadership, democratic centralism, and the vertical division of the class upon organisational hierarchies become hindrances to, rather than necessary mechanisms of, democratic practice.

Contrary to a number of other organisations, RA did not see recruitment and the building of RA's numbers as key tasks. Whilst people could come and work with RA, and become a member/participant, RA never actively sought to bring people to RA. In one respect this is based in the analysis that struggles of the class emerge regardless of whether revolutionaries tell them that they should be struggling or not. Many RA interviewees asserted that rather than building RA, they sought to assist in the

[238] Nick Southall, "Democracy and Revolutionary Action", *Op Cit.*
[239] Revolutionary Action, *Program 2nd ed.*

development and formation of other self-organised collectives.[240] This is in line with the autonomist perspective of pluralising the points of resistance and organisation. However, a number of interviewees also stated that this was the weakest point of RA's praxis, and that whilst RA managed to work with other established organisations and participated in a number of struggles, the development of other points of resistance and organisation didn't happen.

Many studies have shown that within radical movements, and democratic organisations, political differences have a tendency to manifest in organisational splits and sectarianism.[241] These tendencies manifest both within the organisation, and between organisations. Thus, the problem of sectarianism is a problem that must be confronted when dealing with democratic practice. For RA, a collective attempting to develop a praxis based in pluralism, sectarianism was an issue that necessarily had to be confronted.

The problem of sectarianism was one which recurred for RA. RA saw the need to "constantly challenge the sectarianism that sees workers and their organisations pitted against each other, rather than the ruling class."[242] The primary principles that RA utilised to confront sectarianism were the emphasis on multiplicity; pluralism; autonomy; solidarity; commonality, and respect for alternative approaches to issues and actions. However, the reality of the class struggle, and the relationships within RA, meant that the tendency towards sectarianism was realised throughout the experience of RA. The creation of the collective, in the midst of the struggles that were already in existence, and outside of the established organisations, necessarily implies a separation, or at least a distinction, between the respective politics of each group. The formation of RA then meant

> that having organised, or organising separately, clearly had the tendency of making you sectarian, because you are saying that you are separate, you are practicing separately, and you are in opposition to other organisations.[243]

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[240] Interview, #4, Interview, #5
[241] Sarah Maddison & Sean Scalmer *Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements*, (UNSW Press, NSW, 2006)
[242] Nick Southall, "Democracy and Revolutionary Action", *Op Cit.*
[243] Interview, #2

Although RA's practice involved the recognition of multiplicity, which "involved being open to other theory, which meant being open to them"[244] (other organisations and individuals), the tension remained apparent. The prior, and ongoing, experiences RA members and participants had with practices such as authoritarianism and hierarchy, were a primary cause for the sectarian tensions between RA and other organisations.[245]

RA & NO WAR

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Centre on 11/9/01 in New York, and the subsequent escalation of war and 'War on Terror', RA initiated moves that saw the development of the Illawarra Network Opposing War and Repression (NO WAR).[246] The first meeting brought "tens of people", and organised the "largest peace demo in Wollongong's history".[247] NO WAR was to be a broad coalition of groups and individuals to campaign around the politics of war and repression. The NO WAR meeting on 3/2/02 maintained that

> The NO WAR network was a consciousness raising activist group whose purpose was to work using a variety of approaches to raise awareness in the Illawarra of the politics of war and repression, specifically the war on 'terrorism.'[248]

NO WAR also looked to build broader coalitions with sympathetic organisations. Whilst it would be implausible, and unfair to NO WAR participants to attribute the developments and success of NO WAR to the efforts of RA, it is never the less evident that RA was influential in the early stages of NO WAR. Although some RA members/participants disagreed with the developments of NO WAR from an early stage, interview #2 maintains that RA had a positive effect on the democratic structures of NO WAR, through debating for the strengths of the politics of participatory democracy.[249] The minutes of NO WAR's meeting of the 3/2/02 cover discussions of "Guidelines Regarding Decision Making", "Aspects of Group Structure", "Facilitation" and "Subgroups"; it is evident here the politics of RA had some effect on the internal politics

[244] *Ibid.*
[245] Interview, #2, Interview, #3, Interview, #7
[246] Revolutionary Action, "Minutes 9/10/01", *Email Archive*, msg#593
[247] Interview #8
[248] NO WAR, "NOWAR Minutes 3/2/02", *Email Archive*, msg#25
[249] Interview, #2

of NO WAR.[250] The decision making process at this point was based on "consensus and democracy", in the case of a significant 'block' to consensus, NO WAR would "adopt a decision making process based on timed discussion, and…if necessary, a straw vote."[251] The chair person, or position of facilitator, was to be rotated.[252] Finally, it was decided that "where appropriate tasks within an action be shared amongst small subgroups."[253] These organisational practices embody certain principles of participatory democracy, and of RA's politics.

RA & Class

RA generally thought of itself as an organisation of the working class: the people involved with RA were working class; that the collective was of the working class, and that RA was not separate from the class but existed within it. The working class was thought of broadly, "consisting of all those who must sell their labour power to live."[254] To a certain extent RA was taken to be a "political 'space'" that was a concentrated manifestation of working class life, "where members of the class can come together to increase the potency of their collective and individual rebellion."[255] RA was an immanent organisation of the working class, not "unique" or separate from the proletariat, and functioned successfully only because its "membership/participants [were] involved in numerous struggles, debates, discussion etc that make up working class life."[256] Thus, the formulation of RA's position within the class and the struggle differed from many other organisations. Whilst RA formed as a part of the class struggle, it was not playing a "unique role, in the way that a Leninist would conceive the Party playing, or an anarcho-syndicalist a union," but was a formation "through which a small section of the class attempts to take control of their lives."[257]

[250] NO WAR, *Op Cit.*
[251] *Ibid.*
[252] *Ibid.*
[253] *Ibid.*
[254] Revolutionary Action, *Program*
[255] Dave, msg #214
[256] *Ibid.*
[257] *Ibid*

These ideas regarding the position of RA as a political space illustrate key points in RA's analysis of class struggle and democratic practice. The collective maintained that through the process of class struggle, the working class would create democratic organs "of working class power."[258] Point 3 of the revised *Platform* states that these bodies will be "strike committees, community organisations and workers' councils" and that these organisations will be the "basis for the revolution and the society it creates."[259] RA came to see itself as one such democratic organisation of the class struggle.[260] The primary point here is that RA articulated a politics that placed the working class, broadly defined, as the subjects of the revolutionary movement, and the development of democratic practice at the site of their everyday struggles with capital. Such a formulation of class struggle challenges the idea that specific organisations, separate from the immediate experience of the class, are necessary to plot the course of the struggle with capital. Rather, power is located in the autonomous organisations of the class. The practice of RA was to aim at engaging directly with the working class in their immediate struggles with capital.

RA emphasised the need to acknowledge and cultivate a multiplicity of strategies, tactics and actions within the revolutionary movement.[261] Moreover, RA argued that such a multiplicity of strategies and struggles was the reality of organic class struggle, that the "workers were the experts of their own experience."[262] The idea of leading the class, or introducing ideas from outside of the class, was thus a contradictory position from the perspective of RA. Class struggle was, for RA, an inherent feature of life and social relations during capitalism where,

> We try to participate wherever possible in any action of the working class, not by proposing the adoption of our program, but by endeavouring to increase the direct participation of the class, in all decisions that affect them.

[258] Revolutionary Action, *Program, 2nd ed.*
[259] *Ibid.*
[260] Dave Eden, *Email Archive*, msg#?
[261] Nick Southall, "Democracy and Revolutionary Action", *Op Cit.*
[262] *Ibid.*

RA: Class, Autonomy & Democracy

It is evident that at the organisational level, both internally and regarding RA's perception of its relation to the class and other radical organisations, that RA implemented many of the principles of autonomy, self-organisation, plurality and radical democracy. In terms of those associated with the collective, both members and participants, there were numerous, sophisticated mechanisms to ensure participation and democratic practice. Similarly, RA worked effectively with a number of other organisations and individuals across an array of issues. In both of these respects RA argued for radical democracy, and often succeeded in locating power within the organisation at the most grass-roots level to cultivate a broad democracy. In the tradition of libertarian communism, RA also identified the primary site and subject of struggle at the point of the workers themselves, and did not privilege the collective as a leadership organisation that was separate from the class. This was realised through both theory and practice, at the organisational level. The next chapter will take up the question of how these foundations translated into the engagement with political action.

Chapter 5

Port Kembla Copper Smelter Picket, May 2000 – interviewee Alexander Brown is 2nd from right facing ahead.

"Class is determined by class struggle…Class is a political concept…a collectivity that struggles in common."

-Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 2005), p104

Revolutionary Action: Class Struggle, Plurality, and Democracy

The previous chapter examined key aspects of RA's internal democratic practice, and the collective's general perspective on democracy throughout the class struggle. The purpose of this chapter is to examine RA's engagement with class, autonomy and democracy, in terms of the collective's involvement in three struggles in the Wollongong region between 2000 and 2003. The struggles that will be examined as case studies of RA's practice are the M1 2000 Port Kembla Copper (PKC) smelter picket, the Joy Mining dispute throughout 2000, and the struggle against the development of Sandon Point. These actions illustrate an array of qualities in RA's engagement with political activity, and raise a number of questions concerning the politics of RA's

practice, particularly in relation to class and class struggle. In order to understand RA's engagement with struggle during this period, it is important to consider the collective's relationship to the union movement, and the South Coast Labour Council (SCLC). In this context, this chapter will briefly analyse events in the SCLC during 1999 and early 2000. Secondly, this chapter will examine RA's perspective on political action. Thirdly, RA's engagement with the case studies will be analysed. These three analyses will indicate whether RA's practice was based on an operational conception of class, autonomy and democracy in terms of struggle.

SCLC, Unions & RA

The union movement and the SCLC have a strong history in Wollongong, and any analysis of class struggle in the Illawarra needs to at least address the machinations of this historically influential movement.[263] In this context then, on the 15th of March 1999, the *Illawarra Mercury* reported that the SCLC was in the midst of a split.[264] The secretary of the SCLC, Paul Matters, was facing a challenge to his position from Arthur Rorris. Paul Matters had been secretary of the SCLC for ten years, and was widely recognised as a controversial figure.[265] Both Rorris and Matters were considered left-wing, and so as the challenge developed, a division deepened within the union movement, as both candidates had support of left-wing unions.[266] On the evening of the 24th of March 1999, the SCLC's vote for the position of secretary took place. However, although Matters officially retained his position, there were alleged inconsistencies in the vote counting, effectively undermining the legitimacy of his leadership. As a result, those siding with Rorris walked out, rejected the decision, and split from the SCLC.[267] The unions, which had split from the SCLC with Rorris, formed the Illawarra Council of

[263] Jim Hagan & Henry Lee (eds.), *A History of Work and Community in Wollongong*, (Halstead Press in Association with Wollongong University Press, New South Wales, 2001) & Jim Hagan and Andrew Wells (eds.), *A History of Wollongong*, (University of Wollongong Press, Wollongong, 1997)
[264] Lisa Carty, "Labour Council Unity Under Threat", in *Illawarra Mercury*, 15/3/1999
[265] Maritime Union of Australia, *Rank & File*, iss1, September, 1999
[266] Lisa Carty, "Arthur Takes Matters Into His Own Hands", in *Illawarra Mercury*, 19/3/1999 & Geoff Failes, "Support For Matters" in *Illawarra Mercury*, 24/3/1999
[267] Geoff Failes, "Rebel Unions Meet to Form New Body", *The Illawarra Mercury*, 19/5/1999

Trade Unions.[268] A year later, in March 2000, Rorris unanimously took the position of secretary of the SCLC, reuniting the unions, after Matters resigned from the position.[269]

In many important respects, all the events that occurred within the SCLC over the course of 1999-2000 are far removed from the experience of RA. Indeed, RA only formed in August of 1999, and it has already been shown that the collective's praxis was based in a rejection of the politics associated with the official labour movement. Moreover, from a political perspective, RA had no immediate stakes in the result of the SCLC internal struggles, due to its emphasis on the democratic practice of self-organisation.[270] However, at least two interviewees identified a relationship between the events within the SCLC and the union movement, and the experience of RA.[271] This relationship was framed in two ways. According to interviewee #2, throughout the time of the divisions within the SCLC and its repair, the official bodies of the labour movement were weakened. In this context the mechanisms of political representation that directed working class resistance and its organisation were operating on a reduced level of effectiveness. For interviewee #2, this meant the

> usual structures…the usual hierarchies and authoritarianism that controlled the trade union movement, and therefore controlled most of the traditionally considered organised working class, were not working properly. So for a group like RA, we could move into the spaces that were left by that lack of control…and take action, where at other times in history there would not have been the space there to do it.[272]

This space was the terrain on which to attempt to interject a radical approach to political struggle, at the immediate site of the conflict. That is, "there [was] the space for Joy and the space for PKC…to be less influenced by the hierarchy of the labour movement and the Labor Party".[273]

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[268] *Ibid.*
[269] Nick Hartgerink, "Comment", *The Illawarra Mercury*, 23/3/ 2000
[270] Interview #2
[271] Interview #2 & Interview #8
[272] Interview #2
[273] *Ibid.*

Interviewee #8 framed the relationship somewhat differently. Prior to the formation of RA, some people who were later to form RA assisted in organising the challenge made by Rorris for the position of secretary in the SCLC. Whilst it was a "very un-RA way to organise" - because of having to "get the numbers" within the SCLC bureaucracy, "we played a big role in…" the challenge to Paul Matters.[274] With the change in leadership, the SCLC became more democratic, and "we had friends that were more willing to accommodate us…I don't think that it would have been as easy for us to get…people onto the May Day Committee" if it wasn't for the change in leadership.[275] Similarly, it was asserted that

> because some of us had come from a position of being good personal friends with some of the people in the union movement, and we've done the right thing by them…that gave RA a bit more credibility than if it was just an organisation that had sprung up out of nowhere.[276]

So, even though "RA organised in a totally different way to them", that is to the unions and other political organisations, and "they hassled us" about the politics of RA, because of other relationships "they trusted us, and listened."[277] This formulation of the relationship emphasises not so much the weakened leadership and bureaucracy, but rather a reasonably accommodating relationship with elements of the union movement.

Taken together, the events outlined above, and the accounts given by the interviewees, provide an indication of the context in which RA sought to implement its politics of radical democracy, and militant action. The first major events in which RA participated occurred just after the SCLC was re-united, and Rorris took the position of secretary. The Joy Mining dispute began in late March, and RA's involvement in the May Day committee, and assistance in forming the M1 sub-committee, occurred in the same month. [278] As will become clear throughout this chapter, RA did operate outside of the leadership of the official labour movement, and challenged its politics whilst working with a number of people from varying political perspectives. To this extent, the practice of RA did operate within, and fill, a space that was left open by the inabilities of the

[274] Interview #8
[275] *Ibid*.
[276] *Ibid.*
[277] *Ibid.*
[278] Rowan Cahill, "Joy Mining Workers Holding the Line", *The Guardian*, September 20, 2000, & Revolutionary Action, *Timeline*, (See Appendix)

official labour movement. Also, RA's practice was sometimes assisted by elements of the union movement. However, none of the above is meant to reduce the experience of RA either to the deficiencies of the official labour movement, or to allowances made by its more democratic elements.

Revolutionary Action

Numerous articles throughout the *enRAged* journal illustrate that RA was attempting to develop a form of intervention in political action that both broadened the scope, and expanded the democratic basis, of class struggle. RA recognised that class struggle was made up of a multiplicity of tactics, strategies and actions.[279] Yet RA's own interventions into a number of campaigns was based on a belief that militant, direct action constituted a fundamental component of the struggle against capital, and in the construction of revolutionary democratic practices.[280] This belief is intimately related to RA's emphasis on attempting to organise in a way that constructs the form of liberation within the struggle for liberation.[281] It is worth outlining this emphasis on militant action before moving onto the case studies. This will assist in understanding RA's perspective on intervention, and to better inform the assessment of whether this perspective did complement the struggle, or was rather a misplaced emphasis on the role of militancy in political action.

In RA's conception of political struggle, the role of practice and action assumed central importance. As discussed in chapter three, the politics of self-organisation necessarily involve the cultivation and circulation of skills and experiences throughout all sections of the class.[282] It is only through the construction of practical tools of organisation and action that a politics of self-organisation can become sustainable. The relationship between class as a political concept and democracy is that the development

[279] Nick Southall, "Revolutionary Action & Democracy", *Enraged*, iss2, 2000, Frew, "Direct Action, Autonomy, Revolution", *enRAged*, Iss6
[280] Revolutionary Action, *Programme, 2nd Ed.*,
[281] *Ibid.*, & Revolutionary Action, "How RA Organises", *enRAged*, Iss.5
[282] Harry Cleaver, *Autonomy, Work & Refusal: An Interview with Harry Cleaver* http://www.eco.utexas:80/Homepages/Faculty/Claver/index2.html

of democracy is directly dependent upon the process of struggle.[283] Upon this basis, the direct, democratic participation of individuals in decisions and actions that affect their lives is crucial for self-organisation and democracy. For RA, militant class politics was a perspective that offered an opportunity to develop skills in organisation and action that would assist the class in its struggle against capital.[284]

From RA's perspective, militant politics were an inherent aspect of radical democratic struggle. Not only was it identified as being necessary in certain situations, but was also a foundation of democratic practice.[285] The primary site, at which participants in RA identified the emergence of practices of militancy, was within sections of the class outside of apparatuses of the organised labour movement. In the article "Ain't No Life" it was stated that "the Wollongong M1 action…helped to reintroduce militant picket line strategies…that challenged the authority of the dead hand of the labour party and the trade union bureaucracy."[286] Going further, this article continues that "a whole section of the class, mainly young people, was engaged in struggle that was outside and often completely unseen by the official movement."[287] Even when the militant elements of an action were in the minority, participants in RA argued that these elements should be supported, and that they often contributed to the development of the struggle.[288] Indeed, the question, according to "Defying Corporate Tyranny – Politics of the Picket Line", was "not necessarily how many people take action, but why and how they take action and who controls the action people take?"[289] That is, is there a democratic foundation to the militancy, and does it assist the struggle.

Inherent to RA's emphasis on militancy was a critique of leadership, elitist, and hierarchic politics. The emphasis on militancy was essentially an exploration of the forms

[283] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *The Circulation of the Common*, at http://geocites.com/immateriallabour/withefordpaper2006.html
[284] Nick Southall, "Revolutionary Action & Democracy", *OP Cit.*, Frew, "Direct Action. Autonomy. Revolution", *enRAged*,
[285] Nick Southall, "Revolutionary Action & Democracy", *Op Cit.*
[286] Dave Eden, "Ain't No Life", *enRAged*, iss3, 2001
[287] *Ibid.*
[288] Nick Southall, "Defying Corporate Tyranny – Politics of the Picket Line", *enRAged*, iss2
[289] *Ibid.*

in which struggle was beginning to take, outside of the channels of political representation.[290] According to one article the rise in militancy indicated that "self-organisation and self-management ha[d] replaced the faith in parties, unions and institutions"[291], whilst another article states that "direct action is about complete self-empowerment".[292] These tendencies were located both throughout the international movements that occurred throughout the late 1990s, and within the local struggles within the Wollongong region.[293] In certain respects, RA can be viewed as a unit which sought to assist in the circulation of struggle throughout the Wollongong region. It is clear throughout the *enraged* journal, that a number of RA participants saw a growing level of militancy within the struggles taking place in Australia, from the PKC picket, through to the Woomera breakout.[294] The remainder of this chapter will locate RA's practice within the three case studies indicated earlier.

RA & PKC: M1 2000

The oldest industry of Port Kembla was the Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company of Australia Ltd. (ER&S), providing a foundation for the local economy, and influential in terms of the composition of the local working class.[295] In 1980 ER&S was taken over from Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia, becoming Southern Copper in 1990. By 1995, CRA had shut down Southern Copper, as a result of non-profitable upgrades, and problems with environmental laws and pollution.[296] Eklund has stated that as a result of the industrial down-turns throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Port Kembla lost its identity as an industrial town.[297] Nonetheless, in 1996 Southern Copper was taken over by PKC, a Japanese-led consortium, with plans of reopening the plant and resuming operations,

[290] Dave Eden, *Op Cit.*
[291] *Ibid.*
[292] Frew, *Op Cit.*
[293] Alexander Brown, *Op Cit.*, Dave Eden, *Op Cit.*, Revolutionary Action, "Towards a Global Ruling Class", *enRAged*, iss2, Waldo Bello, "When Davos Meets Porto Alegre: A Memoir", *enRAged*, iss3,
[294] *Ibid*.
[295] Erik Eklund, *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*, (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2002), pp39, 49 & 102
[296] *Ibid.*, p178
[297] *Ibid.*

which it did in 2000. However, the resumption of operations meant a return to the pollution associated with the smelter for residents of Port Kembla. The issue of pollution had been raised a number of times throughout the years of the smelter's operations, and the closure of the plant in 1995 was welcomed by a number of Port Kembla residents.[298] Moreover, when the smelter was taken over by PKC, the company was granted exemption, under state legislation, from the environmental restrictions that had influenced the closing of the plant in the first place.[299] Hence, the resumption of operations at the smelter became a political issue, affecting not only Port Kembla residents, but the broader Wollongong community, industry and PKC.[300]

In 1997 the Illawarra Residents Against Toxic Emissions (IRATE) formed, developing out of Residents Against the Smelter (RATS), which had formed in 1996.[301] RATS aimed to block the reopening of the smelter, organising public meetings and protests to raise awareness. The change of name to IRATE signified a broadening of the scope of the organisation – to be a "general voice of the community" and for "interacting with developers and authorities".[302] According to Arcioni and Mitchell, the opposition to the smelter saw a number of previously "passive workers" employed at the smelter, become "active protesters."[303] As a part of the struggle against the reopening, a legal case was opened against PKC. In order to undertake legal proceedings, former IRATE organiser Helen Hamilton, left IRATE, and took the court case in her name.[304] On the 24th of December 1996 the court case was filed, and on the 29th of May 1997, it began.[305] IRATE continued the public meetings and protests as key parts of their campaign against the smelter, but placed the campaign within the courts as the fundamental terrain of struggle.

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[298] Elisa Arcioni, "Copper Cancer & Callous Corruption", *Tertangala*, March, 1999, pp4-5
[299] *Ibid.*, & Revolutionary Action, *enRAged*, iss1, 2000
[300] Elisa Arcioni, *Op Cit.*
[301] Elisa Arcioni & Glenn Mitchell, "Environmental Justice in Australia: When the RATS Became IRATE", *Environmental Politics*, vol.14, no3, June 2005, pp363-379
[302] *Ibid.*
[303] Based on a survey of residents in Port Kembla, undertaken by members of IRATE, 80% of those surveyed opposed the reopening of the smelter. *Ibid.*
[304] Helen Hamilton, "Port Kembla & the Fight Against the State" in Kathleen McPhillips (ed.), *Local Heroes: Australian Crusades from the Environmental Frontline*, (Pluto Press, Annandale, 2002)
[305] *Ibid.*

The May Day 2000 PKC picket was the first major action that RA was involved in.[306] By this time PKC had resumed operations, whilst IRATE, and Helen Hamilton, continued their campaigns. In March, RA helped establish the M1 sub-committee of the May Day committee.[307] On 27th of March the sub-committee decided to picket PKC as part of the "M1 Carnival Against Capital", a day of action synchronised globally, and framed in anti-capitalist terms.[308] The first issue of *enRAged* contains two articles illustrating RA perspectives on the issue. Firstly, that the action at PKC needed to be placed in the context of a struggle against global capital and the state, asserting that the exemption granted PKC from environmental restrictions illustrates "how local governments conspire with multinational corporations to block the community's attempts to stop environmental destruction" and that this "provides us with a good starting point to identify the real enemy of environmental sustainability – global capitalism."[309] Secondly, that the action against PKC on M1 is placed within the series of global struggles against global capitalism, and that the history of May Day is closely related with anti-capitalist resistance.[310]

The M1 picket was a community picket, organised and put on by community members, not a trade union. It involved the "SRC, left parties…all sorts of groups…already existing and organising the struggle [and] the local community"[311] with numbers of "around one hundred" people participating.[312] For RA, the PKC picket provided the first opportunity to work with a number of people, both organisationally and in action, whilst also putting into practice its approach of militant politics. Organisationally, the picket was decentralised, non-hierarchical, and largely informal.[313] Throughout the day meetings were held on the picket lines discussing tactics, illustrating democratic practice during the event. The practice of RA in relation to the M1 action was

[306] Revolutionary Action, *Timeline*
[307] *Ibid.*
[308] Revolutionary Action, *enRAged*, iss1, 2000
[309] Alexander Brown, "Know Your Enemy" in *enRAged*, iss1, April, 2000
[310] Christine Carey, "Carnival Against Capital: Origins of M1", in *enRAged*, iss1, April, 2000
[311] Interview #2
[312] Revolutionary Action, *RA Email Archive*, www.groups.yahoo.com/group/revolutionary-action/, msg#64
[313] *Ibid.*

to form militant pickets, and stop the operations of the smelter for the day. This involved picketing entrances where trucks accessed the site, and using bodies directly to achieve the prevention of the trucks' entry. In order to co-ordinate the action, the Transport Workers' Union of the truck drivers' was contacted, and notified of the planned actions, in order to create solidarity between the picketers and the drivers.[314] As a result of the organising involved, the action was viewed largely as a success.[315]

Although the picket was seen as successful, a number of questions are posed by the action. The fundamental questions of relevance here are the relationship between the picket and the workers at the smelter, and the role of direct action at the event and in the context of the overall struggle against PKC. The fact that it was a 'community picket' meant that workers of the plant could not participate without breaking the law.[316] As a result of this, participants blockaded the truck entrances rather than specific PKC workers.[317] It is arguable that this action represents a contradiction of class interests between the workers' of PKC, and those struggling for its closure. However, situating class struggle, and autonomy, within the context of the social factory points beyond this contradiction.[318] The decision by sections of the class which identifies needs, which then inform action, is a central component of autonomous struggle.[319] The claims against PKC represent such an identification of needs, and the campaign against the smelter illustrates an active insubordination within the social factory of capital.

Throughout the day the picket closed two of three entrances, due to civil disobedience undertaken by a number of people, whilst nine people were arrested.[320] A number of these nine were RA members.[321] The primary point here is the question of

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[314] Interview #2
[315] Revolutionary Action, *RA Email Archive*, www.groups.yahoo.com/group/revolutionary-action/ &Chris Williams, "Carnival Against Capital", *Green Left Weekly*, May 8, 2000
[316] Nick Southall, "Defying Corporate Tyranny", *OP Cit.*
[317] Interview #2
[318] Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005), & Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1999)
[319] *Ibid.*
[320] Chris Williams, *Op Cit.*
[321] Interview, #8

establishing a democratic relationship between the general picket and its militant sections. The PKC picket involved a broad range of people and tactics, and also fit into IRATE's struggle against the smelter. The overall trajectory of IRATE's campaign was to shut down the smelter and close off its operations altogether.[322] The M1 action, and RA's tactics, clearly fits into this broader scope of the campaign against PKC. Although the PKC picket may not have been the pivotal point of the struggle, it was an organic and complementary component of it. Many interviewees asserted that there was a good relationship between the actions taken by RA and other participants in the picket, for example, "RA people were pretty full on about…doing this sitting in front of the gates, getting dragged away, [but] other people weren't going 'don't do that, you'll bring us into disrepute'"[323]

RA & the Joy Mining Machinery Dispute

In a similar example to the PKC struggle, the Joy Mining Machinery (Joy) dispute illustrates the intimate relationship between seemingly local struggles, and the operations of global capital. Unlike the PKC struggle, however, this campaign was based around immediate work conditions for a specific section of the class. The Joy Mining dispute lasted for 205 days of 2000, beginning in March, and ending in October that year.[324] During that time there was a 24 hour picket at the Moss Vale Joy plant, the initial site of the conflict, and pickets in Coniston and Unanderra, as the struggle broadened.[325] The campaign also received international attention, and international solidarity actions.[326] A number of unions were involved in the struggle, whilst a significant amount of community members also joined in the pickets. RA participants took part in this campaign on picket lines in Moss Vale, Coniston, and were involved in office occupations in Unanderra.[327]

[322] Elisa Arcioni & Glenn Mitchell, *Op Cit.* & Helen Hamilton, *Op Cit.*
[323] Interview #8
[324] Rowan Cahill, *Picket Line Dispatches from the Joy Mining Machinery Dispute, 2000*, (Bull Ant Press, Bowral, 2002), pp3-4
[325] *Ibid.*, pp5-7
[326] *Ibid.*, pp7-8
[327] Revolutionary Action, *RA Email List*, msg#198

In 1994, Joy began operating as part of a US based company called Harnischfeger Industries Inc. The company was operating under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.[328] Such protection allowed the company to continue operations whilst reorganising and restructuring production, in an attempt at cutting the cost of operations.[329] As such, from 1998, the company had begun an "aggressive" campaign aimed at downsizing throughout its global divisions.[330] For the Australian divisions of Joy, this meant the casualisation of sections of the employees, an undermining of conditions and the laying-off of a number of workers.[331] During the period of September/October of 1999, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), Australian Workers' Union (AWU), and the Communications, Electrical, Plumbing Union (CPEU), were negotiating for a new agreement on the site.[332] After five and a half months these negotiations collapsed around the issue of the workplace agreements.[333] Under the legislation of the 1996 Workplace Relations Act, Joy sought to reduce labour costs through restructuring the workplace agreement contracts.[334] The Joy workers were formerly under one agreement covering all the workers, but the company wanted to introduce four separate agreements covering different sections of the Moss Vale site. Upon the rejection of the proposal of four separate contracts, Joy threatened to close the plant, and thus the workers set up a picket at the site as a part of the struggle to save their jobs, conditions and entitlements.[335]

Unlike at the PKC action, the picket at the Joy site was put on by the trade unions.[336] The company's jobs were moved off site beginning in late March and in response the picket formed.[337] On April 14, 2000, the Joy workers were issued with the first of two lockout notices. The lockout was for three months, but the workers remained

[328] Rowan Cahill, *Picket Line Despatches*, p1
[329] *Ibid.*
[330] Rowan Cahill, "Joy Mining Workers Holding the Line", *Op Cit.*
[331] Geoff Failes, "Mining Machinery Centre to Close", *The Illawarra Mercury*, February 4, 1998
[332] Rowan Cahill, "Joy Mining Workers Holding the Line", *Op Cit.*
[333] Nick Southall, "No Joy", *Tertangala*, iss5, 2000, pp20-21
[334] Geoff Failes, "Little Joy in Dispute", *The Illawarra Mercury*, March 28, 2000
[335] *Ibid.*
[336] Rowan Cahill, *Picket Line Despatches*, p3
[337] *Ibid.*

on the picket.[338] As the picket continued, Joy issued a Supreme Court injunction against the unions, "preventing them from blockading the site."[339] In this situation the unions were powerless to prevent the movement of jobs and machinery off site. However, despite the fact that the unions were unable to confront Joy directly, due to the injunction, the participation of community members helped keep the struggle going, and to increase its militancy. Community pickets have been a tactic utilised by unions in order to defy laws prohibiting the organisation of pickets, and were used in the MUA dispute in 1998.[340] In the Joy dispute, 'concerned citizen committees' were formed to participate in the pickets.[341]

RA participated in the Joy dispute through the 'concerned citizen committees'.[342] Numerous people participated through the 'committees', including students and other community members.[343] Due to the lack of legal restrictions on the 'committees', these participants were able to act in a more direct manner at the site of the struggle. RA participants joined the picket at Moss Vale in the last week of April, just prior to the M1 picket of PKC.[344] Throughout the Joy campaign, building upon their experience at the M1 picket, RA participants sought to contribute to a militant response to the actions of Joy at Moss Vale.[345] Once again, this involved direct action and blockading the site to prevent its operations. As the conflict continued, and after Joy moved some of its operations off site to Coniston, actions were held at these other sites in Coniston and Unanderra.[346] RA participants were involved on the pickets at Coniston, and also in the occupations of Joy workshops in Unanderra.[347] It is evident that all of these actions had a significant effect on the Joy workers' struggle, by placing increased pressure on the company and the state.

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[338] *Ibid.*
[339] *Ibid.*
[340] Anne Davies & Helen Trinca, *Waterfront: The Battle That Changed Australia*, (Doubleday, Sydney, 2000), pp219-225
[341] Nick Southall, "No Joy", *Op Cit.*
[342] Interview, #7
[343] Rowan Cahill, *Picket Line Despatches*, pp7-9
[344] Revolutionary Action, *Timeline*
[345] Dave Eden, "Ain't No Life", *enRAged*, Iss.6
[346] Rowan Cahill, *Picket Line Despatches*, p7
[347] Revolutionary Action, *RA Email Archive*, msg#198

In this example of RA's practice, it is much easier to discern the relationship between the militant elements of the Joy campaign, and the interests of the workers directly affected by the lockouts. It is clear that the injunctions placed on the unions, preventing their actions, elevated the role of citizen participants to a level of high importance in the campaign. Indeed the strengths of the militant elements of the struggle are in part indicated by the responses taken by the company and the state against the participants. Once again questions of democracy, organisation and class power were raised during the struggle. One article in *enRAged* raised the problem of the organisation of the pickets, and confusion arising from the relationship between community pickets and the union leadership.[348] In many respects the citizen committees were self organised, and sought to employ tactics and strategies that were beyond the control of the union leadership. It is possible to see that the self-organisation of some participants during the Joy dispute beyond the direction of the union leadership assisted the overall struggle.

RA & the Sandon Point Struggle

The final case study is the ongoing struggle against the development of Sandon Point. The Sandon Point campaign is still in operation, and involves numerous issues; as such this overview of events at the site will be drastically limited, focusing only on events that lead up to the development of stages 1-6 of the total plan. In 2000 Stockland Constructors Pty Ltd (Stockland), "submitted development applications to Wollongong Council for stages 1-6" of its 20 stage, 1200 house, residential plan for the Sandon Point area.[349] Sandon Point is located between Bulli and Thirroul on the east coast of NSW. In 1998, an aboriginal skeleton, up to 6000 years old, was found in the beach at Sandon Point, and exhumed.[350] The Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE) is on the site 24 hours a day, as Sandon Point contains a known sacred burial site. There is "local knowledge of up to eight more skeletons" that were dug up during the 1970s on the same

[348] Nick Southall, "Defying Corporate Tyranny – Politics of the Picket Line", *Op Cit.*
[349] Hamish Brown, (ed.), *The Sandon Point*, vol.1, iss1
[350] *Ibid.* The Skeleton was a "Kuradji", proving this site to be of high cultural significance to the local Indigenous community. www.sandon-point.org

site.[351] Due to these reasons, it is clear that Sandon Point is of high cultural significance for local indigenous people, and that the development of Sandon Point carries serious political implications.

There are a number of other political issues that characterise the struggle against Stockland. The area is one of the last green corridors that run from the escarpment to the ocean, placing an environmental significance on the site.[352] A significant portion of the development site is on wetland, and has determined unfit for development by a Local Environment Study (LES).[353] The "Old Bulli mine to Sandon Point tramway" has a European heritage listing.[354] There is significant evidence of illegality involved with the case to develop Sandon Point. According to the *Sandon Point*, there were at least six known breaches of the law, including "illegal slashing of endangered forest ecosystem on the site" and "illegal destruction of Aboriginal artefacts."[355] There has been a strong and significant struggle waged against Stockland by the local community over the last five years. There is a twenty four hour community picket that operates at the site, set up in March 2001.[356] The picket was set up to "provide a direct, physical and visible presence of the widespread community support for the protection of the area and opposition to the proposed residential estate."[357]

During 2002 there were two major direct actions at the Sandon Point development site. The first was a three day blockade of the site, as Stockland attempted to move heavy earth moving machinery onto the site, between the 11th and 14th of February 2002. After the development proposal was granted, Stockland attempted to bring in the first of its machinery for the construction. The blockade involved over 200 picketers, physically using their bodies to prevent the entry of the machinery. On the 14th

[351] Hamish Brown, *Op Cit.*
[352] Nick Southall, "Blockade", *enRAged*, Iss4, & see www.sandon-point.org
[353] Sandon Point Website, http://sandon-point.org.au/drupal/about?PHPSESSID=c8cc311b41438505833fafcca2ea8838
[354] *Ibid.*
[355] *Ibid.*
[356] *Ibid.*
[357] *Ibid.*

the police began a "massive operation" to get through the blockade.[358] 70 people were arrested on the day, as Stockland began moving machinery on to the site.[359] However, the company then had to stop work as a court injunction won by the Indigenous community prevented the commencement of development. The second major direct action at Sandon Point occurred just three months later, in May 2002. As earth works began, a broad based and militant action occurred, which pulled down the fences around the site, and involved the 'lock-on' to machinery.[360] Seven people were arrested as the protest sought to prevent operations by Stockland.

Participants from RA were involved in both of these mass direct actions.[361] Indeed, participants in RA saw the mass expression of militant activity as a positive development in the class politics of the region. Rather than viewing these protests as solely an illustration of desperation and frustration, these actions were seen as an expression of power. As an account of the three day blockade in *enRAged* states, "this type of defiance helps keep capitalist forces off-balance and increasingly emboldens and empowers the working class as their own liberators."[362] Moreover, these actions were important for the amount of self-organisation that underpinned the events. Numerous people were already organised and militant, as interviewee #1 states,

> Take Sandon Point…they already knew about blockade training etc. and were ready to do that sort of action, to take that approach. They had already talked about what they could do, and we weren't doing anything that was anymore radical than what people there were already doing.

In these events, RA's perspective on class struggle was clearly reflected within the broader aspirations of the class.

<u>Situating Class, Autonomy & Democracy in these Actions</u>

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[358] Lisa Carty, "Blockade", *The Illawarra Mercury*, February 13, 2002
[359] Nick Southall, "Blockade", *Op Cit.*
[360] 'Locking on' is a method of direct action whereby an in individual or group of individuals chain, or secure, themselves to an object, entrance, or each other.
[361] RA members had also committed time to the picket line in between these more militant events, and for May Day 2001, RA had an bush regeneration action at Sandon Point, illustrating that it was not only militant protests in which RA was involved.
[362] Revolutionary Action, "Blockade", *enRAged*, iss2002

These case studies illustrate three struggles within the social factory of capital. As was discussed in chapter three of this thesis, the social factory constitutes a condition of social organisation, in which virtually all broader social relations exist within the context of the reproduction of capital.[363] In this situation, all of society operates as a "point of production."[364] Thus, in certain respects, all of these struggles embody elements and practices of insubordination to capitalist command. Whilst each particular campaign developed within specific conditions, and confronted capital from varying perspectives, there is an identifiable common thread that runs throughout these campaigns both politically and organisationally. This thread is evident in the refusal of conditions that capital seeks to impose on social life, and in the development of an array of tactics and strategies to carry out this refusal. By attempting to highlight the experience of RA within these struggles, it is the aim to illustrate how class struggle, autonomy and democracy relate. However, the results of this assessment are not meant to ascertain whether or not RA was the pivotal organisation in any of the struggles outlined above. Rather, the results are meant to help determine an understanding of radical democratic practice, based on theories of class, autonomy and democracy, and the role of such a practice within the broader movement, through the example of RA.

Within the three struggles outlined above, members of RA participated as a part of the militant sections of the campaigns. The analyses carried out within this chapter illustrated that RA viewed militant political action not only as a means to struggle against capital in pursuit of immediate demands, but also as an inherent aspect of the development of radical democracy. This argument asserts that through the process of struggle, the class develops practices that can become constituent forces of radical democracy. In this instance it is possible to see that RA's perspective on political action can contribute to understanding class politically, as a subject of struggle. Chapter three illustrated that understanding class within the social factory involves moving beyond a conception of class that refers only to an economic category. Moving beyond capital's proletarianisation of all work through its total subsumption of labour, class becomes a

[363] Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1979), p63
[364] Mario Tronti, "Social Capital" *Telos* no.17, Fall 1973, pp98-121

mode of political activity and resistance. Thus, from this perspective on class, it is possible to identify the fact that a militant perspective on political struggle contributes to the development of a political conception of class within the struggle.

The perspective of autonomy was based in the process of workers, or singularities, identifying their own needs and struggling for them, going "beyond mere reaction to exploitation, or to self-defined 'leadership'".[365] Upon this basis, RA clearly embodied politics of autonomy. Moreover, a significant amount of people involved in struggle throughout the case studies were developing practices of autonomy of their own accord. The campaigns against PKC clearly illustrate the identification of needs and a struggle for them. Similarly with Joy, the pickets, blockades and occupations that characterised this struggle indicate that this campaign did not only put these workers back in their jobs, but involved the implementation of a diverse range of tactics and strategies in the construction of a militant struggle. Moreover, a number of these practices dealt with democratic organisation, and developed out of self-organised politics. The example of mass direct actions at Sandon Point involved an array of tactics and strategies, self-organised and deployed by the participants in the events.

As was articulated earlier in the thesis, the practice of political and class autonomy involves the development of practices that are mutually supportive, but also recognise diversity and multiplicity within the struggle.[366] Moreover, constructing such a set of relationships becomes the constitutive force for an open, participatory, and non-hierarchical democratic practice. That is, the struggle itself becomes the process through which democratic practice develops, and through this process a number of practices arise. The question thus becomes one of relating these sets of practices in a way that creates an ongoing development of resistance, as the foundation for democratic practice. The instances of self-organisation and action outlined illustrate the beginnings of such a process.

[365] Harry Cleaver, *Work, Autonomy & Refusal*, pp2-3
[366] *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to analyse problems of radical democratic practice and organisation, and ways of dealing with these problems through the utilisation of the concepts of class as a subject of struggle, and autonomy. The praxis of RA, its strengths and limitations, were used as a lens through which to view and deal with these problems. Finally, through the above analyses, the thesis aimed to contribute to an understanding of contemporary radical organisation.

The analysis of RA's praxis was placed in the context of the offensive of neo-liberal capitalism over the past decade, and the emergence of radical responses made across the globe in the late 1990s. Within this period of struggle there was a clear engagement with questions of organisation, radical democracy, and effective ways of countering capital. Also, within these movements, the concept of class emerged as a subject of struggle against contemporary capital. However, this formulation of class was not the same subject as the homogenous proletariat of classical Marxism. Rather, this conception of class necessarily emerged through the conflict with capital, at all the sites in which capital attempts to impose its logic of exploitation and oppression. That is, class struggle within the social factory of capital as an embodiment of diverse perspectives and politics. Given this, the questions regarding the organisation of struggle in a way that does not reduce the singular experiences of revolt to an overarching, representative and homogenous form of organisation are imperative for understanding how democratic struggle against capital can occur.

In chapter three this thesis illustrated that by relating the concepts of class, autonomy and democracy, it becomes possible to recognise struggle and organisation in an open or pluralist form. Class, in this instance, moves beyond being only an economic category, imposed by capital. Rather, it becomes a method of political intervention and struggle, a project of insubordination. Within the social factory of capital, class struggle takes many forms. Thus, the principle of autonomy is both a reality of class struggle, and also a tool with which to orient organisation and democracy. Understanding class as a

political concept involves recognising diversity in struggle. The question of democratic organisation then becomes one of relating the diversity of resistance in a mutually supportive way, without undermining the autonomy of each respective point of resistance. The concept of the circulation of struggle provided a method by which to understand the way in which struggles relate to each other and inform each other, thus assisting in building the power of the class. Democratic practice that is based on principles of self-organisation is closely related to the processes of the circulation of struggle. Self-organisation allows for common struggle, as well as the potential for autonomy in organisation.

Through the analyses of RA, in chapters four and five, it was made evident that the collective developed a praxis that embodied a perspective of autonomy, radical democracy, and a conception of class that was grounded in the struggle against capital. Internally, the organisation of RA involved an operational conception of democratic practice that articulated a pluralist perspective. Through implementing principles of autonomy and pluralism within the organisation, RA demonstrated that radical self-organisation can be an effective method of political intervention. The construction of the collective upon a common foundation that functioned by accentuating autonomy and pluralism, RA was able to develop an organisational perspective that it could take to the class struggle.

The three case studies that were utilised to examine RA's engagement with political action illustrated that RA's perspective of militant action could assist in the broader struggles of the class. RA was a space for the development of political practices that could confront capital, and allow for dynamic participation in the broader struggle. Although the collective was small, the practices developed within the collective were, to a certain extent, reflected throughout the movement. Through committing to working in common with other organisations, whilst at the same time maintaining an emphasis on militancy, the collective was able to integrate its practice within the struggles illustrated in the case studies. In this situation it is important to acknowledge that RA's effectiveness in struggle was not based on a privileging of militancy in struggle, but rather a

commitment to democratic practice, in which militancy became but a part. Indeed, the example of NO WAR is as significant an example of RA's commitment to struggle and democracy, as are any of the militant actions. The primary point, however, is that there is no necessary contradiction between militancy and other forms of struggle; the question is their democratic nature and effectiveness in confronting capital.

Despite these strengths in the process of struggle, and the development of diverse practices that embody autonomy and democracy, there remained weaknesses. These weaknesses are reflected both in RA and the broader struggle. The clearest indication of weakness is the inability to continue the pluralising of points of collective organisation and struggle. Although RA may have engaged effectively in political action, and in doing so helped create a politics of autonomy and democracy where it could, the collective was limited in its ability to broaden the base of self-organisation throughout the class. The main issue that arises from this problem is the difficulty in understanding how such a politics can continue to pluralise, throughout the struggle against capital, on every day issues. However, although the experience of RA may be limited in forecasting the prospects of future democratic organisation against capital, it is nevertheless clear that such questions of democratic organisation remain crucial in the current context. Indeed, if the project of democracy is to be concerned with liberation and autonomy, then an understanding of the ways in which people have experimented with this project are important. In this respect, the experience of RA and its engagement with class, autonomy and democracy provides useful insights into radical democratic practice.